

Faculty of Arts
University of Helsinki

STUDYING NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
LITERATURE: NATURE/LAND RELATIONSHIPS
AND NATIVE (OJIBWE) ECOLOGUE IN LOUISE
ERDRICH'S *BIRCHBARK HOUSE* SERIES

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Native cultures in North America have rich oral traditions with many stories that have preserved whole lifestyles with different worldviews, traditions and values. The present-day Native storytellers, such as Ojibwe writer Louise Erdrich, create out of these traditional narratives new kinds of tribal treasures in the form of novels, plays and poetry as well as literature for younger readers. The themes of these narratives include such topics as traditional and modern survival stories, relationship to nature or land, circles and cycles, and the interdependency of humans and other life forms.

In this thesis the main research questions consist of nature/land and nature/land relationships in Louise Erdrich's young adult fiction, *The Birchbark House* series, and these questions are studied especially from the viewpoint of deep ecology, to the extent this approach fits and can be applied in the case of Native and Ojibwe cultures. In order to promote a more precise and Native culture focused analysis of Native American literature, both adult and young adult or children's literature included, a creative tool for dialogue, namely that of Native Ecologue and Native (Tribal) Ecologue, as in Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, is developed during the research process. As a concept, Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue includes in the process of dialogue the different elements of traditional Ojibwe culture and nature/land relationships, and humans, non-humans and other life forms of the past and present are all equally valuable dialogic partners in the storytelling process. When studying more modern Ojibwe or other Native American stories, this tool of analysis can be modified to meet the needs of present-day narratives and the requirements of different (literary) genres.

Nature/land and nature/land relationships are studied by taking a closer look at three main points, namely how nature/land functions fictionally as a teacher and a source of healing for an Ojibwe family; how nature/land is a source of survival, challenges and happiness for them, and how the Ojibwe life and landscapes change during the 100-year journey by Omakayas and her family. This US focused thesis also addresses Native North American literary studies, ecocritical approaches and deep ecology in the Native and Ojibwe context as well as Louise Erdrich's role as an Ojibwe and American writer and *The Birchbark House* series as Native literature for young adults but also for a more mature audience.

The viewpoints of ecocriticism and deep ecology as well as Ojibwe culture are applied when close reading, especially from the cultural point of view, Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series with *The Birchbark House* (1999), *The Game of Silence* (2005), *The Porcupine Year* (2008), *Chickadee* (2012) and *Makoons* (2016), which tell the story of an Ojibwe girl Omakayas and her family and their journey from Madeline Island to the Great Plains of Dakota through a 100 years of Native American history. These novels, which have received less academic attention than other Erdrich's writings, are linked with the story of Erdrich's own ancestors and describe a time when the Ojibwe lifestyle changed radically due to contact with white settlers.

Based on this thesis, it can be stated that Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series is more than just novels for younger readers – they are educational books for all ages, providing much information about Ojibwe history, society, values, stories, culture and lifestyle and Ojibwe relationship to nature/land. Erdrich's novels, even if partly fictional, embrace the silent history of her ancestors and give voice to the less heard story of a young Ojibwe female. History becomes also her story. Erdrich shows the changes in Ojibwe lives from a child's or a young person's perspective, and she shares her personal knowledge of Ojibwe language, worldviews, spirituality and values with her readership. In addition, her stories honor the Ojibwe elders, such as grandmother Nokomis.

As transformation, change and empowerment are essential elements in Ojibwe storytelling tradition, Erdrich also engages in rebuilding and restor(y)ing the narrative landscape of the Ojibwe through her writings and she shows us the importance of all Native voices, young and small included. Her topics can be considered glocal, both global and local, by nature and they address such themes of human and nature/land relationships and shared survival that are relevant both for modern Native readers and non-Native audiences. As a dialogic tool for Native literary analysis, Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue allows readers to become more informed about the different elements of Ojibwe culture present in Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, and this tool can then be applied in different Native cultural contexts and Native literary analysis as Native (Tribal) Ecologue.

Keywords: Native American Literature, Ojibwe Literature, Young Adult Fiction, Deep Ecology, Native Ecologue, Native (Tribal) Ecologue, Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, Louise Erdrich

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Stories have the power to connect people and places globally and locally. Stories move us, inform us, create us and we create them. Through shared stories, we are deeply interlinked with one another and nature/land. Stories are not born in isolation but are a shared effort. Similarly, academic stories and research can only happen in co-operation with others. This study is a work of such co-operation, a process that has taken several years.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- *AILN* – *American Indian Literary Nationalism* by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack and Robert Warrior
- *BaI* – *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* by Louise Erdrich
- *C* – *Chickadee* by Louise Erdrich
- *FS* – *Four Souls* by Louise Erdrich
- *M* – *Makoons* by Louise Erdrich
- *MM* – *Mixedblood Messages* by Louis Owens
- *OD* – *Other Destinies* by Louis Owens
- *ODi* – *On Dialogue* by David Bohm
- *T* – *Tracks* by Louise Erdrich
- *TBH* – *The Birchbark House* by Louise Erdrich
- *TES* – *The Everlasting Sky* by Gerald Vizenor
- *TGoS* – *The Game of Silence* by Louise Erdrich
- *TPY* – *The Porcupine Year* by Louise Erdrich

PREFACE

Our world has always been made of stories, both oral and written. Stories create cultures and cultures create stories. Native cultures in North America¹ have rich oral traditions with many types of narratives. These Native stories have contained everything. They have preserved whole lifestyles with different worldviews, laws, moral codes, humor, history, traditions, spirituality and values, and they are closely linked with land or nature. Therefore, the worth of stories in oral cultures is beyond doubt, and the people who have preserved such stories have been of immense value to tribal legacy. In fact, as Chippewa Kimberly Blaser has described in an interview with Jennifer Andrews (2007), “[t]he leaders in many of the Indian communities were leaders because they were orators” (4).

Present-day Native storytellers create out of these traditional narratives new kinds of tribal treasures in the form of novels, plays and poetry, not to forget young adult literature. This thesis focuses on Native North American literary studies, deep ecology, Ojibwe culture and Louise Erdrich’s literature for young adults, namely *The Birchbark House* series that include the following novels: *The Birchbark House* (1999), *The Game of Silence* (2005), *The Porcupine Year* (2008), *Chickadee* (2012) and *Makoons* (2016), which tell the story of an Ojibwe girl Omakayas and her family and their journey from Madeline Island to the Great Plains of Dakota through a 100 years of Native American history. These novels have received less academic attention than other Erdrich’s writings, yet they are significant reading, for example, from the point of view of nature/land and nature/land relationships in modern Native literature. They are by no means juvenile or simplistic but rather have several layers of cultural and social wisdom and knowledge and present the traditional yet dynamic worldview of the Ojibwe.² Even if fictional, they are also linked with the story of Erdrich’s own ancestors and describe a time when the Ojibwe lifestyle changed radically due to contact with white settlers. Therefore, these novels also provide valuable historical information through stories.

Lately, the concern for our planet has increased in all fields of academic studies, and it is claimed that we have entered, since the Industrial Revolution, a global yet still debated phase called the Anthropocene, a new geological age and an epoch dominated by human influence and a great change in terms of biodiversity and earth ecosystems. As Sylvia Mayer states, the Anthropocene, as a concept of planetary connectedness, “insists on conceptualizing and representing ‘humanity’ as an agent – while not losing sight of diversity and (cultural) otherness, both human and non-human, an issue that especially postcolonial ecocriticism and animal studies have correctly identified as crucial to the ecocritical project” (500).

¹ In this thesis, due to Louise Erdrich’s background, my main focus lies in the United States, although at times I also refer to Canadian/First Nations scholars and academics and other Canadian/First Nations sources.

² In this thesis, while recognizing that the original name for the tribe is Anishinabe, in its different written forms, I use for the Ojibwe (used by Erdrich) the form preferred by the writer or researcher in question, such as Anishinabe, Anishinaabe, Anishinaabeg, Chippewa, Ojibwa, etc. I also use the word Indigenous when this form is used by the writer in question.

The wide notion of Anthropocene, with its focus on human impact on nature and planet earth, from biodiversity to climate change and from plastic pollution to land use, includes many views that are also present in different Native cultures and their key concepts. One such point is the notion of circles and cycles that is visible for example in resource-conscious circular economy, which is becoming more and more relevant in present societies. Much like in different Native cultures, it relies on the idea of circular and cyclical thinking that can promote shared survival in times of diminishing natural resources by restoring, reusing and regenerating by design. At best, circular economy, and especially social circular economy, promotes sustainable business but also benefits the environment and society by including all actors in conversation and dialogue for shared survival and global well-being.³ For example, such global organizations as the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation actively speak and act for a restorative, circular economy for the benefit of all societies.

Within literary studies, the concern for the earth is visible in ecocriticism which has become one of the more prominent theories in recent years, including many different ecological, political, nature conservational and, for example, feminist approaches. One of the developments within ecocriticism is the notion of deep ecology that resonates with traditional Native cultures and their values of interdependence, the interrelatedness of all beings and respect for all forms of life, as well as Native literary theory development. The concept of circles and cycles is part of Native and Ojibwe worldviews as well as ecocriticism and deep ecology. As stated in *Deep Ecology and World Religions* by editors Barnhill and Gottlieb, deep ecology, which was born as a reaction to replacing nature with “the environment” (1), no longer wishes to see the human as a subject and the natural world as the object. Rather, as mentioned by John A. Grim, it emphasizes the interrelatedness of all living beings (*Deep Ecology and World Religions* 39-40). In literary studies, this means rethinking of the subject position and who owns the story, and it can also mean giving voice to the previously silenced Other, whether this Other is nature/land, a Native protagonist or in the case of *The Birchbark House* saga, a young female Ojibwe.

Hence, in this thesis the main research questions of nature/land⁴ and nature/land relationships are studied from the point of view of deep ecology, to the extent that this approach fits and can be applied to Native and Ojibwe cultures. Moreover, what I have called Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue,⁵ refers to a

³ For social circular economy, see e.g. www.socialcirculareconomy.com/.

⁴ In Ojibwe language and vocabulary, there is no exact equivalent to the word ‘nature’ or ‘environment’ – rather, the Ojibwe use such words as land, wild/natural places or specific words like lake, river, island, plain etc. and in their language, the land owns the people, and not vice versa (see, for example, *Experiencing Environment and Place through Children's Literature* by Amy Cutter-Mackenzie, Phillip G. Payne and Alan Reid, quoting Jojo Quillet 87, and Basil Johnston's *The Manitous*). As mentioned by Turtle Mountain Ojibwe educator James Vukelich, in his online teachings on “Ojibwe Word of the Day,” the ancient Ojibwe or even proto-language based inanimate word *aki* refers to earth, land, soil and ground (kizhenaabeg.weebly.com/about-jameskaagegaabaw.html). Hence, in this thesis I add the word ‘land’ when talking about nature as an overall concept.

⁵ Native Ecologue is a word of my own coinage from the words Native and Ecologue, signifying a specific Native culture- or nation-based form of dialogue that can be used when analyzing

more extensive notion of Native culture- or nation-based dialogue where nature/land and humans, non-humans and all other life forms of the past and present are all equally valuable dialogic partners. Nature/land and nature/land relationships in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* novels are studied by taking a closer look at three main points, namely how nature/land functions fictionally as a teacher and a source of healing for an Ojibwe family; how nature/land is a source of survival, challenges and happiness for them, and how the Ojibwe life and landscapes are changing during the 100-year journey by Omakayas and her family.

In addition, the thesis discusses Native North American literary studies, especially from the viewpoint of children's and young adult literature, ecocritical approaches and deep ecology from a Native studies point of view and Louise Erdrich's role as an Ojibwe and American writer and *The Birchbark House* series as Native literature for young adults.

As a conclusion, one may say that Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series is more than just novels for younger readers – they are books for all ages, Natives (and non-Natives) alike, providing much information about Ojibwe history, society, values, stories, culture and way of life. These traditional teachings are still as valid as when Omakayas learned them. As elaborated in the thesis, *The Birchbark House* series presents vernacular landscape and participatory thought as well as nonanthropocentrism and the glocal, by appealing and being accessible to both local and more global audiences. Erdrich's writing in her *Birchbark House* series also conveys many of the key features of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, and with her novels, Erdrich teaches her Native (and non-Native) audiences traditional Ojibwe ways. For Omakayas and her family, nature, or land, with all its beings, has great value, and there is no difference between big or small, in fact small things have great power. All beings are connected with one another and are part of the natural world. Nature/land is a sacred yet everyday teacher, and the art of storytelling and healing is passed on to the next generations. The Ojibwe, such as Omakayas and her family, treat nature/land with utmost respect and humility. They know how their whole existence is dependent on the bounty provided by nature/land and higher beings. Their strength as a family and as part of the Ojibwe is dependent on each other, much like in the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Ojibwe, including bravery/courage, humility, truth/honesty, respect, wisdom, generosity and love (Styres 14). These seven teachings that appear in different forms create the basis of "the good life" or *bimaadiziwin* or *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well for the Ojibwe as explained in chapters four and five. In addition to being an example of *bimaadiziwin* [the good life] (see, for example, Michael D. McNally's *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* 25), *The Birchbark House* series reflects The Seventh Generation Principle (see, for example, Patty Loew's *Seventh Generation Earth Ethics*),⁶ the concept of seven (eventually eight) fires and *Jiganawendamang Gidakiiminaan*, Keeping the Land in the spirit of Gizhe

Native storytelling and literature. Since Erdrich's stories are related to Ojibwe culture, Native (Tribal) Ecologue is named more specifically Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue in this thesis.

⁶ The Seventh Generation Principle has its origins in Iroquois culture, and as a concept and philosophy it has become part of many Native cultures, as explained by Patty Loew (Ojibwe) in *Seventh Generation Earth Ethics: Native Voices of Wisconsin*.

Manidoo (see, for example, *Routledge Handbook of Landscape Character Assessment: Current Approaches to Characterisation and Assessment* by Fairclough, Herlin and Swanwick 243-244).

These novels by Erdrich also represent what Michelle Pagni Stewart calls in *Ethnic Literary Traditions in American Children's Literature* the "Third Generation" of children's books by going beyond identity issues and deconstructing any essentialist or limiting notions of Native identity ("Alive and Well and Reclaiming Their Cultural Voice: Third Generation Native American Children's Literature" 45). Erdrich's manifold characters reflect what Professor Brendan Fairbanks from the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis calls the "heart way." Fairbanks mentions in an interview, "The Heart of the Ojibwe Language," for *Indian Country Today* how Ojibwe language and culture is filled with references to what he calls the 'heart way.' "It is a distillation for all things Ojibwe. Rather than relying on Western-based deductive reasoning, the heart way emphasizes spirituality and human relationship with the earth, plants, elements and animals, all of which are imbued with spirit."⁷

Erdrich's novels embrace the silent history of her ancestors and give voice to the less heard story of a young Ojibwe female. As Nora Murphy writes in *Minnesota History*, "history by omission doesn't make good history" (286).⁸ Therefore, it is important to include all the voices for a fuller understanding. Erdrich shows the changes in Ojibwe history from a child's or a young person's perspective, and shares her personal knowledge of Ojibwe language, worldviews, and values with her readership. Her stories also honor the Ojibwe elders, such as grandmother Nokomis in *The Birchbark House* series. Just as transformation, change and empowerment play a central role throughout Ojibwe traditional stories, so too Erdrich rebuilds and recreates the narrative landscape of the Ojibwe through her writings.

Turtle Mountain Ojibwe James Kaagegaabaw Vukelich, one of the leading voices in Native Language revitalization (capitalization original), emphasizes in his teachings how from the Ojibwe point of view the good life means living in balance and treating the earth according to the seven Ojibwe teachings.⁹ When searching for a good life, *bimaadiziwin*, and trying to understand the balance and the interconnectedness and equal value of all life in all its forms – the great circle of life – we can learn empathy and compassion from each other and together we may go forward to a better place on this planet earth that we all share.

⁷ Pember, Mary Annette. "The Heart of Ojibwe Language." An interview with Professor Brendan Fairbanks. *Indian Country Today* (30.8.2017). (newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/the-heart-of-ojibwe-language-SxD-4sP9lUyzUPfrmUHy_g/).

⁸ Murphy, Nora. "Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children's Historical Fiction." *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284-295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

⁹ Vukelich, James. Online teachings: (www.youtube.com/channel/UCFk1tCJQEH_BP4Kw6ckr4YQ). Kizhenaabeg. (kizhenaabeg.weebly.com/index.html).

1. INTRODUCTION

In this introductory part, I define my research questions and the theoretical approach of the thesis and I discuss the concept of the Native American novel from the challenges of defining the notion for modern survival stories.

In the following sections of this thesis, I then focus on Native American children's and young adult literature and Native American literary studies, ecocriticism and deep ecology, expanding the notion of dialogue to Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, and applying deep ecology approaches as lenses through which to view Native American young adult literature and especially Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, her realist historical yet fictional novels, and her representations of the world of the Ojibwe.

My focus lies in Native North America, so when mention is made, for example, to Native American culture, Native stories or Native literature for young adults, this refers to Native North America, emphasis being on the US Ojibwe and the territory of the USA, due to Louise Erdrich's background, albeit at times I also refer to for example Canadian-based (First Nations) writers and scholars that are relevant for example in terms of understanding the Ojibwe people and their varied culture at large.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL APPROACH INTRODUCED

In this section of the thesis, I introduce my research questions, my theoretical approach and the key concepts relevant for this study. In the later chapters, these are elaborated in more detail.

When considering the present global state of the planet earth and its imminent challenges for shared survival, the notions of changing nature and landscape, the previously mentioned Anthropocene, ecocriticism, ecology, sustainability, circular economy and our dialogue with nature, land and each other come to mind. These themes are now more relevant than ever before, as we are all experiencing the effects of the corona pandemic. Leading US biologist Thomas Lovejoy comments on the corona situation in *The Guardian* (25.4.2020) by saying that we did this to ourselves by not respecting enough the natural world and by intruding into nature.¹⁰ Hence, the topics and questions posed in this thesis are very current and also bear a global significance.

In the yearly published research reports by Worldwatch Institute, the current themes vary from eco-lessons, EarthEd and legacies to possible future

¹⁰ Weston, Phoebe. "‘We did it to ourselves’: scientist says intrusion into nature led to pandemic." (www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/25/ourselves-scientist-says-human-intrusion-nature-pandemic-aoe).

threats and possibilities available for humankind as a whole.¹¹ Without a sustainable lifestyle and nature conservation and rejuvenation, there can be no life conditions for future generations – in that sense, we are all one, fully dependent on each other and nature or land and never separate. In the abstract to her article “Spirits in the Material World: Ecocentrism in Native American Culture and Louise Erdrich’s *Chickadee*,” Li-ping Chang writes the following (148): “In the face of the worldwide ecological crisis, ecocriticism, ‘the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment’ as ‘an earthcentered approach to literary studies’ has become an important part of contemporary literary theory (Glottfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, 1996, p. xviii).” Similarly, this topic is relevant when discussing different Native cultures or Native writings and it also bears a global significance. For Native people, as described by Jace Weaver, robbing traditional lands means a kind of psychic homicide – Native people lose landscapes that are essential for their faith and their identity, they lose lands that are “populated by their relations, ancestors, animals, and beings, both physical and mythological” (*American Indian Literary Nationalism* 64).

Hence, I wish to explore the notion of nature/land and nature/land relationships in Louise Erdrich’s novels and especially in her writings for young people or in novels where the younger generation is in focus. The questions raised include what kind of legacy and inheritance does Erdrich wish to establish in her writings, what are her possible teachings for the younger generation, or her audience in general, what are the nature- or land-related themes and values she emphasizes, how does she write about them and to what extent does she wish to rewrite Ojibwe history? I also want to explore whether these novels are actually not just literature for younger readers but rather Native, or more precisely Ojibwe, literature for all, using the younger generation as storytellers or telling the saga from their point of view. To quote the web page of Erdrich’s Birchbark Books, her novels are meant for all with a childlike imagination: “Beloved by children young and old, The Birchbark House series by Louise Erdrich consists of *The Birchbark House*, *The Game of Silence*, *The Porcupine Year*, *Chickadee*, and *Makoons* (with more to come!).”¹²

I especially chose from Erdrich’s children’s and young adult literature the above-mentioned *Birchbark House* series with *The Birchbark House* (1999), *The Game of Silence* (2005), *The Porcupine Year* (2008), *Chickadee* (2012) and *Makoons* (2016) due the fact that these stories have not yet received a great deal of academic attention and they form part of Erdrich’s growing young adult literature oeuvre (Erdrich proposes to write a sequel to *Makoons*). They have been written at a time of increasing global awareness of the above-mentioned threats to our shared existence and at the time of increasing need for community spirit. This awareness is expressed by Louise Erdrich through her Birchbark Books concept. Her bookstore in Minneapolis is a “teaching

¹¹ *Worldwatch Institute* (www.worldwatch.org/).

¹² *Birchbark Books* web page on Louise Erdrich’s *Makoons* (birchbarkbooks.com/louise-erdrich/makoons).

bookstore” and a “hobbit hole” for children and adults, with a strong emphasis on community survival, regional culture promotion, and nature awareness:¹³

Boozhoo! Welcome.

Birchbark Books is operated by a spirited collection of people who believe in the power of good writing, the beauty of handmade art, the strength of Native culture, and the importance of small and intimate bookstores. Our books are lovingly chosen. Our store is tended with care.

Also, what makes these novels especially interesting is the fact that they are based on Erdrich’s attempt to retrace her own family history around the Turtle Mountain area in North Dakota and Madeline Island in Lake Superior in the late 19th century (*TBH*, Thanks and Acknowledgements). In addition, Erdrich wishes to add to Ojibwe history the previously less heard voices of a young female protagonist and a respected female elder, Nokomis, and she wants to share with her readers the story of Omakayas and her family during great changes to Ojibwe life in the latter part of the 19th century. In this way, the historical becomes personal and carries its meaning from the past to the present and the future.

So, in this thesis, the role of nature/land and nature/land relationships are studied from the point of view of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue (a concept created during this research process), as later explained in more detail. The following three questions are studied by close reading, especially from the cultural point of view, Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series, including the above-mentioned novels:

- How is nature/land as a teacher and as a source of healing depicted in her stories?
- How is nature/land represented in her stories as a source of survival, challenges and happiness?
- How do Ojibwe life and Ojibwe landscapes change in her stories?

Naturally, it is partially artificial to separate these themes or questions under different headings, since they all are connected and form a continuously

¹³ Louise Erdrich’s *Birchbark Books* web page (birchbarkbooks.com/).

expanding story, as do the partially overlapping chapters of this thesis. However, in my analysis of *The Birchbark House* series, I look at the above-mentioned points from different angles, having as my focal point the story of Omakayas (or Omakakiins, *TPY* xi) and her family and their journey through the changing Ojibwe landscapes from the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker to different locations in the Great Plains in the 19th century.

When thinking about the notion of close reading, especially in the context of Native literature, it is good to pay attention to a few aspects of this term. As expressed by Rebecca Walkowitz, there is no consensus about the exact definition of close reading – it can be anything from analyzing the text's very smallest units (words) to a macroscopic analysis of structural elements, narrative devices or thematic clusters (49). Walkowitz votes for something she calls "close reading at a distance," where the focus lies in larger narrative units and "even units that seem to exceed the narrative" (51). As explained by Andrew Klevan, when close reading is practiced for aesthetic criticism, its aim is "to adjust perception and bring to light the previously unseen (or unheard), explain inner workings, refine interpretations [...] and deepen the experience" (82).

We can apply these thoughts to Native story analysis and close reading, for example to Native children's and youth literature, as in case of Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series. As a non-Native reader, one's "close reading" is always "distant reading," due to the cultural differences and unavoidable lack of nation-specific knowledge. At the same time there is a need to understand larger narrative units, deepen one's understanding of Native cultures and refine one's interpretations to bring light to those aspects of Native stories that have been previously unseen or unheard or otherwise neglected in traditional literary analysis. When applying "close reading at a distance," it is possible to go beyond the narrative and widen one's understanding of Native literature and Native storyscape within a variety of Native cultures. Hence, in this thesis, such close reading has led to a new definition of dialogue, namely Native (Tribal) or in this case Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, as explained later in greater detail.

For the two key notions of nature/land and nature/land relationships in this thesis, I study and close read Louise Erdrich's novels in a framework offered by ecocriticism and present-day Native American critical theory, young adult literature included. I especially focus on deep ecology and related Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue due to their nature being close to Native American worldviews and Erdrich's own tribal Ojibwe heritage and her varied stories that include many important aspects of Ojibwe life. This is true for many Native stories. As Sean Teuton (Cherokee) writes in *Native American Literature* (19): "Indigenous tales instruct in ethics, ecology, religion, or governance; still others record ancient migrations, catastrophes, battles, and heroism. Oral literatures often form the basis of Native American writing to this day, and so they begin the story of Native literature in North America."

When mapping out the present-day state of Native American literary theory development and the notion of deep ecology I will draw upon the theoretical work of Elvira Pulitano, Jace Weaver (Cherokee), Craig S. Womack (Creek-Cherokee) and Robert Warrior (Osage). I also introduce relevant sources that promote eco-criticism and deep ecology, as well as the importance of dialogue, including scholars like Joni Adamson, Vine Deloria Jr., Catherine Rainwater,

Louis Owens, Donelle N. Dreese, David Bohm, Donald L. Fixico and Hartmut Lutz. These writers and researchers, who are either of Native origin or otherwise closely engaged in Native contact and Native studies, elaborate in detail the many faces of the notions of landscape, place and nature or land and our relationship to these and how knowledge of deep ecology and dialogue can be applied when studying Native cultures and Native writings. As a starting point, I also wish to refer to Kimberly Blaeser's suggestion concerning the theoreticians used when analyzing Native materials that "it would be more productive to employ theories that are created by and from dialogue with Native critics and writers" (Andrews 11). Similarly, in his review of Elvira Pulitano's work on Native American critical theory, James H. Cox states:

Many Native intellectuals and Native studies scholars would like to see academic work that respects the views, worldviews, and specific concerns of contemporary Native people and communities. Robert Warrior and Craig Womack, for example, propose that one way for scholars to be respectful of and responsible to the originary cultures that inform Native literatures is to foreground Native sources in their analyses. (316)

Hence, the emphasis in this thesis is to focus on such theoretical materials and conclusions that are well-informed and respect the Native/Ojibwe culture in question, while acknowledging the great variety of views present today within Native literary studies and Native literary criticism.

As a theory, ecocriticism has become a wide term including several theoretical approaches from Marxism to ecofeminism and from deep ecology to human rights-related theories and environmental justice issues. Of these different angles, I focus on deep ecology, as further elaborated in chapter three. Of the above-mentioned writers and theoreticians Louis Owens (of Choctaw, Cherokee and Irish descent) and David Bohm (who engaged in dialogues with Leroy Little Bear and other Cree, Blackfoot and Micmac Elders) have strongly emphasized in their writings our development from "egocentrism" to "ecocentrism," from an ego-based monologue to an eco-based, more sustainable and nature-based dialogue and a shared sense of community and participatory thinking if we are to survive on this planet. Also, Donald L. Fixico's (Shawnee, Sac and Fox nation, Muscogee Creek and Seminole) and Hartmut Lutz's (an internationally recognized scholar on North American and First Nations Literatures and Cultures) studies on Native circles and cycles are applied in this thesis to expand the key notions of nature/land and nature/land relationships, as they are manifested in Native or Ojibwe contexts and especially in Erdrich's writings.

When talking about a more eco-based dialogue, I wish to use the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue when analyzing Native or specifically Ojibwe narratives and in this case, *The Birchbark House* series. As a term or word, 'ecologue' is, according to different dictionaries, derived from the Greek *oikos*, meaning home, family or family's property, and *logos*, meaning for example discourse, word, divine wisdom and ground. The word resonates with *eco* or *oeco*, *oikos* and has its links with house, habitation, family, property and dwelling place as well as nature and the environment. *Logue* or *logos* or *legein*

is linked with such meanings as speech, word, discourse and to speak or being immersed in or driven by speech. One may thus claim that the notion of Native Ecologue engages us in an expanded discourse where the central theme, instead of being based on *ego* or the narrow human self, is *eco*, nature/land with all its beings and life forms and as a family, all beings of land and nature are connected. In this way, Native Ecologue resonates with ecocriticism and especially its theory of deep ecology, as later discussed in greater detail. As Donelle N. Dreese states, “Ecocriticism, however, much like some American Indian philosophies, promotes and teaches the interdependence and connectedness of all living things, which means that any study of human existence would be insufficient if it did not place us within an environmental context.” (8). Within the theories of ecocriticism, this is most evident in deep ecology, as further analyzed in chapter three.

As a concept, ‘ecologue’ can nowadays be found, for example, to refer to different sustainability and environmental impact projects but since in this thesis, the focus is on Native literature and dialogue between nature/land, in all its forms, and the Ojibwe in Erdrich’s novels, I wish to use this word in a more specific sense, referring especially to ‘Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.’ By this I indicate a more advanced form of dialogue and a tool for literary and story analysis that respects the (traditional) worldviews of Native peoples, such as the Ojibwe, and where humans, non-humans, forefathers and nature as a whole are dialogic partners of equal value. Sean Teuton writes, how two landscapes are aligned in Native cultures – one is the external landscape including many elements of a certain region from mountains to rivers and plants and animals but also the subtle relationship that exists among all elements, indicating how in the universe all is whole, pure and complete. The other is the interior landscape of perceptions, ideas and beliefs, reflecting in a mirror-like manner the exterior landscape, and when bliss and harmony prevail between these two, one can enjoy physical and mental wellness. (*Native American Literature* 23-24). When applying the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, these two landscapes can be made visible and thus provide a more culture-specific analysis of Native Ojibwe storytelling and literature, as explained and visualized later in this thesis.

To support and further analyze the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, I include in my thesis several concepts of Ojibwe culture, such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings (respect, love, truth/honesty, bravery/courage, wisdom, generosity and humility); *bimaadiziwin* or “the good life,” *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well, The Seventh Generation Principle, originating in Iroquois culture, the notion of seven (eventually eight) fires and *Jiganawendamang Gidakiiminaan*, Keeping the Land. Hence, I refer, for example, to such researchers as Michael D. McNally, Frances Densmore, Robert E. Ritzenthaler and Pat Ritzenthaler, Lee Schweninger, Jill Doerfler (Anishinaabe), Kimberly Blaaser (Anishinaabe), Basil H. Johnston (Ojibwe), Sandra D. Styres (Mohawk), P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo), Catherine Rainwater as well as Michael Pomedli, James Vukelich (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) and Patty Loew (Ojibwe). These writers are either of Ojibwe/Native/First Nations origin or if non-Native scholars, well versed in Ojibwe/Native/First Nations cultures.

When the notion of ecology is applied in connection with historical Native Americans or when such matters are discussed in connection with the fictional

narratives of *The Birchbark House* series, we face the debatable assumption that the Native peoples of the North American continent are intrinsically ecologically minded. This complex matter has created many heated (academic) discussions and controversies on the accuracy of the image of nature-friendly Indians versus nature-destroying white men and whether the supposed deeply-held ideas of Indians are based on historical realities or are they just over-simplified thoughts, lacking the complexity of the realities. Jace Weaver writes in his article "Misfit Messengers" about the notion of the Ecological Indian and how the growing environmental movement wanted to use the image of Native Americans in the early 1970s: "Environmentalists grabbed onto the Indian with both hands, remaking him in their own image as the first ecologist, living in perfect harmony with nature, keeping the environment in equilibrium, taking nothing without giving back and wasting nothing that he took." (322).

Another related example in recent research is Michael E. Harkin's and David Rich Lewis's book on *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian* (2007) that offers a critical refiguration of Shepard Krech's 1999 publication on *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. Krech's book basically claimed that despite Native people's so-called ecological knowledge, their acts and beliefs cannot be considered rational in terms of Western ecological conservation and thus his work was much criticized by Native activists and scholars alike. Harkin and Lewis wanted to respond to Krech's disputed claims by organizing a symposium in Wyoming in 2002 and their book, partly a result of the conference proceedings, offers a more complex view on these matters, also questioning how can we possibly ask one culture to meet the standards of another culture's stereotype of them. Weaver continues in his article "Misfit Messengers," how the images of Native Americans as first ecologists or first nature destroyers are both stereotypes. Even if there were both overhunting and deforestation at times, still, for the explorers and colonists arriving from a resource-depleted Europe, the New World was pristine and paradise like (323). To quote Donelle N. Dreese, one may also state that "[w]hile viewing aspects of the environment with spiritual reverence as nothing less than kin and often as the embodiments of Gods or figures of great wisdom, most American Indian cultures have evolved from a tradition that cares for the landscape with respect and reciprocity" (7). To maintain a proper balance, that which is taken is returned through prayer, ritual, and ceremony (Dreese 7).

Instead of drawing a conclusion on whether an ecological Native American exists or not as a Western concept or based on Western criteria, one might refer to Lisa Korteweg's, Ismel Gonzalez's and Jojo Guillet's article "The stories are the people and the land: three educators respond to environmental teachings in Indigenous children's literature," published in 2010 in *Environmental Education Research* (16.3-4). Here Jojo Guillet, who identifies herself as an Aboriginal/Indigenous woman in Ojibwe land, states how we are not stewards of the earth or each other, we are creatures to the earth and each other and "our responsibilities to each other and to the earth are outlined in this relationship of being creatures of each other" (341). In this way, we are never isolated in our decisions. Rather, Guillet continues, we act like ripples (341).

As mentioned by Dreese, such reciprocity with the Native land is expressed by rituals and sustainable thinking. Kimberly Blaeser also describes the importance of Chippewa rituals that are both comforting and a responsibility: “There can be everyday rituals and ceremonial rituals, and I don’t see them as that distinct from one another because they both help us feel the strands that connect us” (Andrews 15). Similarly, Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) talks in her interview with David E. Hall (2007) about the importance of ceremonies and sustainability: “[E]very year, continuously, the people who are caretakers, and people who are careful of the harvest, whoever they might be, are reminded at our ceremonies and at our feasts, that *that* is what our responsibility and our intelligence and our creativity as human beings are about” (4, emphasis original).¹⁴ Since all aspects of Native universe were alive, from rocks, to thunder and wind and unseen spirits governed all life, traditional Native people met their spiritual obligations by prayers, rituals or ceremonies to guarantee successful hunts and bountiful agriculture by the kindness of the spirits (Teuton 13). For Omakayas and her family, it is not strange to talk with one’s spirit animals, to search protection and guidance from forefathers and -mothers and to experience thunder as a sign of the power of Thunderbirds, as described in chapter four.

Respect for sustainability and balance between giving and taking is also one of the main nature/land themes in *The Birchbark House* series, as later elaborated in more detail, yet the Ojibwe approach to environment and all its beings is pragmatic and natural, everyday and earthy, rather than mystical or otherworldly. This same mode of practical and pragmatic nature is emphasized by Jeannette Armstrong, when interviewed by David E. Hall (2007).¹⁵ She explains her thoughts on Okanagan sustainability:

What that means for the Okanagan is that, if you cannot practice that, if you do not know how to practice that, then you are a danger. You’re endangering a whole community, you’re endangering generations of children that are coming. [...] So, you’re lacking knowledge. You’re lacking systems. You’re lacking knowledge and philosophy about yourself. It’s not just about the land, but it’s about yourself. [...] It is always something that is practical, and something that is understood in terms of what you do, and what you don’t do. (4, 5)

Sustainability and the above-mentioned notion of “the Ecological Indian” could also be themes for an ecocritical reading of Native literature, but since my focus in this thesis is on young adult fiction – on Native literature, stories and the Ojibwe world as seen and interpreted through the novelist’s eyes of Louise Erdrich – my core interests include how nature/land and nature/land relationships are depicted and represented in Erdrich’s historical *Birchbark House* series. For the scope of this thesis then the more relevant questions reflect the personal nature/land experiences and relationships and dialogue, or Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, with nature/land and the message Erdrich wishes to convey with her *Birchbark House* series. These emphases also

¹⁴ Hall, David E. “Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Jeannette Armstrong (Syilx).” (www.nativeperspectives.net/Transcripts/Jeanette_Armstrong_interview.pdf).

¹⁵ Hall, David E. “Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Jeannette Armstrong (Syilx).” (www.nativeperspectives.net/Transcripts/Jeanette_Armstrong_interview.pdf).

dictate my choices of the theoretical materials related to deep ecology, as explained later.

Overall, the concept of deep ecology, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, interrelatedness of all beings, and freedom from the dualistic thinking, can address the individual Ojibwe life story or it can be a meta term, covering all of the existence as we know it, as in Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* where mention is made of James Lovelock and his concept of Gaia and the Gaia hypothesis, where the Earth is seen as a kind of super-organism with biochemical and climatic homeostatic self-regulation. Since the Gaia hypothesis focuses on the biosphere as a whole, it emphasizes an ecocentric perspective when we consider different policies and their environmental effects. However, according to this hypothesis, our technology might prove destructive and painful for our own species but probably cannot endanger the life of Gaia as a whole. (Garrard 102, 172-173). Similarly, as Jace Weaver writes in his article (325), "human beings may not have the ultimate power to destroy the terrestrial orb of the earth itself, but they can clearly destroy themselves, take uncounted species with them, and render much of the planet lifeless in the process." However, as Weaver continues, Indigenous peoples have been adapting to climate change for a long time and they have also been adapting and shaping their environment to ensure their survival ("Misfit Messengers" 329). Dreese also comments on Gaia theory in her book on ecocriticism, by emphasizing how by "acknowledging the earth as a living organism, alive in the same way human beings are alive, Gaia theory perhaps introduced an ethical consciousness into environmental studies of the Western world that have been in practice among indigenous cultures for centuries" (7).

Related to Gaia theory is the notion of the seventh and eighth fire of Ojibwe culture. As Michael D. McNally points out, the Ojibwe teachings of the seventh fire, as later described in more detail, also address the paths we humans must choose in order to survive as a humankind. If we choose right, the traditional path instead of the destructive technological path, we may experience the eighth fire of peace and brotherhood (*Honoring Elders* 38). Similarly, in *The Birchbark House* series, Omakayas and her family need to find during their travels a path that combines, in a constructive and non-destructive way, the traditional wisdom with the new ways of being an Ojibwe. *The Game of Silence* ends with a new game, a game of life and death. And yet, despite new fears, Omakayas thinks she also sees other spirits, good spirits that might help them and offer them both adventure and new possibilities (248). Finding such new opportunities is relevant even in modern Ojibwe societies and bears a global significance as well.

As respect for nature/land is one of the more important concepts in Native American cultures, in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series this is manifested, for example, in such stories that are related to the nourishing protection provided to the Ojibwe by nature/land and the appreciation the Ojibwe felt for it, as part of nature/land. For example, in *The Birchbark House*, grandmother Nokomis teaches Omakayas about having a respectful dialogue with land: "'Old Sister,' she said to the birchbark tree, 'we need your skin for our shelter'" (*TBH* 7) or sometimes this deep connection with land and its creatures is expressed as interconnectedness, as sharing the pain with other beings, like Old Tallow shares the suffering with her dogs. "She consulted with her dogs. For a long

time, she sat with them. In their mutual pain and starvation, she had to come to understand their language, and they understood her, too.” (TPY 177).

Even if the concept of the environmental, nature-loving Indian may be an oversimplified, romantic and partially outdated stereotype, however, as Janis Johnson has pointed out in her review, referring to Lee Schweninger’s *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape* (2008), “Native people and writers do have a long-standing and unique relationship with place different from that of European Americans” (190) and they have their own land ethic. For Schweninger, a careful study of such Native land ethic shows that contemporary Native authors “carefully balance a resistance to reductive stereotyping and a firm belief as expressed through their literature that there is such a thing as a meaningful and useful contemporary American Indian land ethic” (15). Patricia M. Jostad, Leo H. McAvoy and Daniel McDonald describe in their research article how “the Native American land ethic includes four belief areas: ‘All Is Sacred’ (there is no separation between the secular and the spiritual); ‘Right Action (individual choice of action is based on the belief system); ‘All Is Interrelated’ (everything is interconnected in an egalitarian system); and ‘Mother Earth’ (the Earth is the physical and spiritual mother of creation)” (565). In *The Birchbark House* series, such land ethic is manifested in the everyday choices by Omakayas and her family when they respect land and its gifts and share them with those in need, whether big or small. One such example is told by Nokomis to Omakayas when they are collecting medicines. Nokomis describes how the little people saved her and her family when they most needed help one winter by showing her where a bear was sleeping. That bear saved their lives, and Nokomis thankfully carries its claw till today (TGoS 103-110). Jostad, McAvoy and McDonald also state that instead of the scientific-utilitarian context more prevalent in the dominant EuroAmerican culture, it is the spiritual context that is more important when talking about traditional Native American beliefs concerning the environment (565). These aspects are also made visible in the concept of Native Ecologue and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, as later visualized in Figures 4 and 5.

Native American land ethic and the nature-oriented/environmental novel both need more academic attention. Janis Johnson further claims, referring to Lee Schweninger, how only a few Native American literature journals or environmental publications have included writings on the Native American land ethic. She points out that Schweninger sees great value in ecocritical study on Native American literature and “the importance of Native American literatures to the growing field of ecocriticism, particularly since European American nature writing remains the predominant subject of ecocriticism” (191). Patrick D. Murphy also states in *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies*, how “[...] the nature-oriented/environmental novel has received far less attention than poetry and nonfiction despite the popularity of these novels and their prevalence across fictional genres” (79), Native American, Asian American and Latino/a writers included. Hence, there is a need to give academic attention to such literature as Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series of nature- or land-oriented historical novels, which clearly represent an Ojibwe perspective and Ojibwe land ethic. And yet, since such Native land ethic and Native American epistemology of interconnectedness of all life spring from a spiritual rather than scientific context, its analysis using

traditional academic tools can be challenging. Hence, in this thesis, the notion Native (Tribal or Ojibwe) Ecologue is created to both respect and give space to a more culture-specific literary analysis of Native materials.

However, for Schweninger, it is important to avoid overgeneralization and to recognize that, like in any culture, there are different individual Native American with different views and ideas about the individual's and tribes' relationship and roles in terms of nature or land, and that such relationships are not simple but on the contrary, are complex and intricate by nature and should not be overly reduced to any simplistic stereotype (Johnson 192). Also, when analyzing Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series and her depictions of Ojibwe, Métis, or Bwaanag (Dakota and Lakota) characters, it is necessary to avoid overgeneralizations or stereotypical thinking and rather see that her characters are fictional constructions representing individual nature or land relationships. Individual life stories are presented in the context of Ojibwe culture and a certain time frame in history, applied and creatively modified by Erdrich. In *The Porcupine Year*, in her "A Few Book Notes" (191), Erdrich explains that a number of events in her novel have historical reference. The fur routes that Omakayas's family decides to enter, the background to one of the stories that Deydey tells, and the relationship between the Ojibwe and the Dakota are based on Oneroad and Skinner's *Being Dakota: Tales and Traditions of the Sisseton and Wahpeton*. These notes are such that they indicate her novels are not just for very young readers; rather, they give such background information that is appreciated by an older audience.

Before going deeper into the world of ecocriticism, I cover first in the following chapters who has the right to write and who has the right to analyze the American Indian/Native American novel and what can be said about Native American literary studies and theory development, especially in terms of Native children's and young adult literature.

1.2 THE AMERICAN INDIAN / NATIVE AMERICAN NOVEL: WHO CAN WRITE AND WHO CAN ANALYZE?

This section of the thesis focuses on the challenging concept of "Native American" or "American Indian," including also some thoughts on the position of non-Native academia as readers and critics of Native writings. Some of the points discussed in this part include Native writers' varied identifications, mediated cultural spaces, white representations of Native people and cross-cultural misinterpretations as well as citizenship issues and the challenging position of the Native American novelist who operates between different oral and written traditions.

What makes a novel Native American and who and what is a Native person? Who can be identified as a "real" American Indian? Does one need to be a speaker of a native language, have a traditional upbringing and be on a tribal roll? How much blood does it take to be an "authentic" Native person? Catherine Rainwater asks this in "Ethnic Signs in Erdrich's *Tracks* and *The*

Bingo Palace.” Is it dependent on the writer’s ethnic identity, is it enough to have one American Indian ancestor (like many Americans actually have) or “[i]s one-quarter enough and one-sixteenth too little”? Or does the author’s experience as an Indian make the text “Native American” rather than his or her genetic profile? Who are “real” Indian authors? (144). Louis Owens also acknowledges the problem of definition when discussing Native American writing and he sees “[t]he recovering or rearticulation of an identity” as being at the core of American Indian fiction – it is a process of deconstruction and *re-membering*, as Paula Gunn Allen puts it (*OD* 5, emphasis original). Owens also comes to the conclusion that “the Indian in today’s world consciousness is a product of literature, history, and art, and a product that, as an invention, often bears little resemblance to actual, living Native American people.” (*OD* 4).

In his Foreword to *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Simon J. Ortiz gives his own definition of Indigenous identity – Ortiz claims that such identity is more than just oral tradition and it does not just depend on Indigenous languages; it has to do with land, culture, and community of Indigenous people. It has its energy, its patterns and its uniqueness (*AILN* xi). One of the broader definitions is presented by Sean Teuton when he refers to Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday’s speech at Princeton University in 1970, where Momaday said that Native people are what they imagine they are and that their best destiny is to imagine who and what, and *that* they are (1, emphasis original).

For some Native people, to be accepted as a member of a Native minority may also require documentation. P. Jane Hafen explains how Indians are the only minority required to show documentation of their minority status. “This proof developed from historical treaty rights and status where individuals were obligated to demonstrate membership in a tribal nation. An individual’s ‘Indianness’ is measured in fractionated blood quantum (4/4, 1/4, 13/16, etc.) and requires a ‘Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood.’”(19). However, there are differences between tribes – some tribes, such as the Cherokees of Oklahoma, require only proof of descent with a document, whereas others demand blood quantum and language facility or residency to qualify as a member of an Indian nation (Hafen 19). The present situation with developments concerning Ojibwe citizenship is described by Jill Doerfler who points out the following in *Those Who Belong: Identity, Family, Blood, and Citizenship among the White Earth Anishinaabeg*, based on her own personal experiences:

Citizenship is one component of Anishinaabe identity. It is the official, legal recognition of one’s identity. It brings legal responsibilities and protections. For many, being Anishinaabe goes beyond legal status and also includes a myriad of other aspects, including kinship relationships, clan identity, actions, cultural values, language, spiritual beliefs, residency, and worldview. There is no single fixed meaning; we define and create our own identity in unique ways. The new Constitution of the White Earth Nation brings a major shift in citizenship requirements from blood quantum to lineal descent. There were many, like me, who occupied a space between – recognized as a “first-degree descendant” by the nation but lacking citizenship for many years. So while many of us considered ourselves Anishinaabe, legally we were left in the margin. The day has come, and we can now tell the story about how we were recognized and

welcomed into the nation as citizens. We see how this pattern has played out across time. Our ancestors consistently resisted blood quantum/racialization, setting an example for us to follow. (91)

For Doerfler, Anishinaabeg or Ojibwe created their identity through their actions. Such identity could be diverse and change over time, and the Anishinaabe respected the individual's right to create and control their own identity (*Those Who Belong* 91). For her, "Anishinaabe identity is complex, dynamic, and fluid" (*Those Who Belong* 95). Despite the great changes the Anishinaabe have faced, they have still maintained their identities, families, communities, and nations, and over and over again they have recreated themselves (*Those Who Belong* 96). This also describes Erdrich's writing – with her narratives in *The Birchbark House* series, by taking her audience on a journey from the Great Lakes to the Great Plains, she recreates the Ojibwe story landscape, restor(y)ing and reshaping a fluid and dynamic Ojibwe reality and identity and bridging the past with the present and the future. She shows how the lives of Omakayas and her family are not static but instead they dynamically recreate their stories in new surroundings – it is all about survivance (Gerald Vizenor's term of active presence and powerful Native expression, e.g. in *Manifest Manners*), not just survival. Omakayas and her family reshape their traditional roles now in new surroundings, and Omakayas learns to be a healer on the Great Plains, understanding a new Ojibwe relationship with the land. When analyzing such diverse Ojibwe or Anishinaabe narratives, we need to go beyond any generic Native American literature analysis and respect the varied and unique cultures of Native peoples and for that purpose, in the process of this thesis, the notion of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue is created.

When considering Native writers' different identifications, there are those who have strongly defined themselves specifically in terms of their tribal identity, such as Paula Gunn Allen or the 3Ws of *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack and Robert Warrior), whereas there are also many Native writers who consider themselves or may generally be seen as Natives with mixed heritage and "mixedblood messages" (the name of Louis Owens's critical study, 1998), such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Thomas King, David Treuer, or Louise Erdrich. In addition, there are writers who have actively functioned within several fields, like Gerald Vizenor and Louis Owens, who have been part of Western academia, yet are also part of a distinctive Native heritage and who have tried to negotiate between Western and tribal realities. With his notion of survivance, as in *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor has created a concept of liberty that goes beyond survival or a mere reaction and stands for active sense of presence and the continuation of Native legacy and Native stories.

Or there is Ojibwe writer and scholar David Treuer, who strongly denies the primary relevance of the tribal affiliation, or even the concept of Native American literature when analyzing and approaching "Native American literature," a notion he finds of dubious value (see *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* [2006]). To turn to Erdrich, is her stylistic virtuosity "the product of an alienated, postmodern sensibility" (285), as claimed by Leslie Marmon Silko in Susan Pérez Castillo's article, or is the reality more like Castillo herself describes?

In the future, rather than focusing on issues which divide Silko and Erdrich, it would be far more productive for students of Native American literature to analyze the many points these two gifted writers have in common. Both offer us a fascinating glimpse into the world of Native American oral tradition. Both describe the emptiness and self-destructiveness which characterize much of contemporary reservation life. Perhaps most importantly, both describe Native Americans, not as Noble Savage victims or as dying representatives of a lost authenticity, but as tough, compassionate people who use the vital capacity of discourse to shape – and not merely reflect – reality. (295)

For active survival, or survivance, of Native legacy and the multiple richness of Native stories, all Native writers' varied voices are needed, Erdrich and Silko included, and they need to be heard and respected as owners of their stories. Being aware of the great diversity of peoples and Native writers in the Western hemisphere is important when trying to understand the many faces of Native American literatures of today. P. Jane Hafen (18) writes: "Distinct language groups comprised of particular cultures and geographic varieties represent many ways of looking at the worlds. Within each particular culture are complex social structures, adaptive techniques and origin stories which reflect the moral universe of each people and, quite often, their geographic circumstances." Similarly, Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, even if labelled as young adult fiction, provides both origin and other tribal stories retold for example by Nokomis, and they are an intimate and integral part of Erdrich's story cycle and circle. And at the same time, from the point of view of American Indian Literary Nationalism, as promoted by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack and Robert Warrior, and in the words of Weaver, "there is more that unites us as Native persons and scholars, both experientially and intellectually, than divides us" (*American Indian Literary Nationalism* 6). So, rather than looking at the differences or different story techniques applied by different Native writers, such as Silko or Erdrich, we may focus on how the varied Native writers promote shared survivance and resilience with their stories.

One might also ask whether all Native individuals in the modern era are more or less products of mediated cultural spaces, so that there cannot really exist any "pure Indians," untouched by Western epistemology and cultural influence. Elvira Pulitano in the "Conclusion" of *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003) doubts the possibility of any "pure" and "authentic" Native American theory, and she claims that Native traditions can no longer be accessed in any other than mediated or hybridized form (189). Pulitano refers to Owens, who sees the need by Native American writers and critics to fight against any "systematic representation of the Indian as a romantic artifact, the inhabitant of an unchanging past" (140). However, as a reaction to Pulitano's views, Jace Weaver sees this issue differently in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Even that Native cultures keep changing and have been very adaptive by nature, this does not mean that these cultures "are globally merging into a single McCulture in which we must all consume the same Happy Meal, using the same critical utensils, and then excrete the same McCriticism" (*AILN* 28). He also questions at what point hybridity made it impossible to express a Native perspective, a separate cultural perspective (*AILN* 28, 29) and he criticizes the idea of dissolving the Natives into a soup

of hybridity, as part of new multicultural melting pot (*AILN* 29). Postmodern and postcolonial theories should not be used to pulverize the tribal mass and destroy the Native traditions (*AILN* 29). As Dean Rader writes in his review of Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*:

[T]he reality is that Native cultures, Native stories, Native literature, and Native discourse are all loaded with beautiful, complex, nuanced, and logical inconsistencies and contradictions[...] A truly inclusive Native American critical theory can never be static, nor can it be monolithic, nor can it be a critical theory. There should always be theories, and they should be multivocal and always in dialogue. (333)

It is maybe wise to emphasize the word *Toward* in Pulitano's book, since it is obvious that in terms of Native American critical theory (or rather theories) there are many different angles and points of views that are constantly playing and negotiating, in a trickster-like fashion, and we have not yet seen what the "end result" may be. In any case, the final say in this debate always belongs to Native people(s) and Native writers and critics themselves.

Similar to the above-mentioned fluid quality of tribal identifications, Native artists and writers move freely between different epistemologies, worldviews and story-telling techniques. Native writers, such as N. Scott Momaday, craft carefully, through their language, fiction and art, and some, like Gerald Vizenor, through deconstructing stereotypical utterances, an Indian or Native American identity. Traditional Native oral stories as well as Western narratives are respected yet also adapted and revised, thus expressing the necessary fluid quality for cultural transformation, survival and empowerment. Owens mentions "[t]he ease and subtlety with which Indians incorporated European mythology into their own highly syncretic oral tradition" (*OD* 9). He refers, as an example, to a Pit River/Klamath storyteller, who says "[t]his here Jesus he was a great man; he was the best gambler in the whole United States!" (*OD* 10). Another example is Erdrich's rewriting/cross-writing of the stories of Christian saints in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. According to Sean Teuton, Native American authors spoke and wrote to defend and inspire their nations but they also spoke and wrote in wonder for other worlds and their peoples (2). However, in Jace Weaver's opinion, such deconstruction and narrative incorporation do not diminish the importance of recognizing Native agency and self-determination in contemporary Native lives (*AILN* 6).

In addition to understanding the great variety of Native identities and Native worldviews, another, also ethical, challenge involves the situation when white writers write literature for example with Native children as their motif and their literature is seen as more "Native" than some of the novels by Native writers – Clare Bradford takes up the case with Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* (1994) that has been praised and rewarded for its "authenticity," although it repeats several stereotypes of Natives, such as "children of nature, tragic figures torn between cultures, and wild, free spirits" (91). As Clare Bradford points out, most representations of Native people and their cultures in settler societies have been and continue to be produced by non-Indigenous writers and artists due to the fact that these cultures and their practices, perspectives and narrative traditions dominate literary productions with their

white, Eurocentric views (71). Therefore, there is great value in such stories like *The Birchbark House* series that gives a realistic and versatile, yet creative view of Native or Ojibwe children and youth and their lives in changing times. In “Sugarcoated Prejudice: Adoption and Transethnic Adoption in Forrest Carter’s *The Education of Little Tree*,” Bo Pettersson also discusses theme of authenticity in connection with Forrest Carter’s popular book *The Education of Little Tree* (1976) that allegedly was an autobiographical account of a Cherokee boy but later was disclosed as a sentimental book written by an infamous right-wing supremacist Asa Earl Carter. The question still remains, whether Carter paid homage to the Cherokee culture or whether his novel was just a hoax (99).

Also, Native American identity has often been read through non-Native eyes. Nancy J. Peterson, for example, refers in “Indi’n Humor and Trickster Justice in *The Bingo Palace*” to the tragically romanticized narrative of Indians as vanishing victims of the late nineteenth century (reappearing even today), greatly inspired by the famous photos by Edward S. Curtis (“The Vanishing Indian – Navajo”) (162). These photos are characterized by the stoic and solemn looks on the faces of Native American warriors, encouraging the stereotypical misinterpretation of Indians as humorless or very serious by nature and thus missing the comic mode in Native culture, promoted, for example, by Gerald Vizenor (Peterson 163). Peterson also advocates avoiding cross-cultural misinterpretations, such as seeing, for example, Erdrich’s novel *Love Medicine* as a “tragic” work rather than a text with many comic features, as happened when many critics first misread her novel as a tragedy rather than as a life-asserting and fundamentally humorous story (162-163). As Peterson (164) points out: “Indi’n humor [...] acts as a survival strategy and as a healing ceremony.” At its best, transformation and change can lead to survival, empowerment and a new mode of life and happiness for the community, for, as Owens puts it, the community equals life (*MM* 11). Despite the darker elements that are also present in *The Birchbark House* series – it is after all a saga of dispossession and loss – in all these novels there is much shared laughter and humor, survival humor, that supports the community in harder times and gives shared strength and hope in times of inevitable change. Through transformation something new is formed and forged.

In addition to possibilities, there are also transformative challenges for Native American writers, who originally come from oral cultures and whose present audiences are highly varied. Such challenges can be related to language or different mental frameworks and the new individually authored medium that is different from the traditional role of an oral, more anonymous storyteller. Also, the audience is now invisible and varied for a Native writer, and no longer is there a live interaction with the listeners, like in tribal storytelling events.

These challenges are also described by Jeannette Armstrong in her interview with David E. Hall where she sees her Okanagan language to be an oral language where orality and understanding are constructed in the mind, with the mind computer, much like with the symbols in the writing system. “If you were to take our language apart, what you would find is a whole series of images from the real word, from the physical world, connected together to

create abstract meaning, and definition.” (6)¹⁶ Owens also elaborates in *Other Destinies* the challenging position of the Native American novelist who, unlike a Native poet, a conveyor of his/her collective oral tradition, works in a foreign, individually authored medium that does not allow him/her to “step back into the collective anonymity of the tribal storyteller” (11) but, as Owens puts it, demands a transformation, a desacralization, a birth of the traditional myths into the secular world of art, using and tearing apart an essentially appropriated, assimilated language and creating a hybridized dialogue that demands at least some knowledge of traditional materials from the reader (10-14). Examples of this would be the traditional trickster tales of Nanapush that are reworked in many of Erdrich’s novels or the challenge of writing for younger people or writing about Ojibwe history, as in the case of *The Birchbark House* series. The audience no longer consists of a homogenous Native people but also of non-Native readers or readers from other Native nations with a great variety of background and values.

Or, as Catherine Rainwater writes in “Ethnic Signs in Erdrich’s *Tracks* and *The Bingo Palace*” on Erdrich, “[u]nlike oral storytelling, written storytelling is directed to an absent audience” (147). In Erdrich’s novels, there are both Native and non-Native listeners, viewers and readers that actively participate in dialogue. Commenting on this point, Pulitano adds, referring to Owens’s thoughts, how instead of seeing the oral tradition as something static that loses authenticity when in a written form, Native American fiction represents its reimagined and reinvented forms (115). Pulitano also mentions, how Native American writers operate in a borderland zone of multiple discourses, with shifting and fluid identities (113). Yet, as expressed by Jace Weaver, hybridization does not mean that Native people become less Native (*AILN* 28).

Even if the Indian novelist who desires to be published is by necessity compelled to write for non-Indian audiences, despite the “dizzying” cultural distance (*OD* 14), Native American fiction repeatedly shows how it can stay true to traditional and evolving Native experience and reimagine, rewrite and recreate itself. As Teuton points out, N. Scott Momaday’s speech at Princeton University in 1970 was just about that – to reimagine meant to recover from the almost 500 years of conquest and disease that nearly devastated the Native nations and to reclaim a freed vision of Native history, land, community and wisdom. The most important weapon here was the mind, to reimagine a different, empowering story (1-2). Through her *Birchbark House* series, even if these stories are partly fictional, Erdrich reinvents Ojibwe storytelling by adding new perspectives and new voices and by telling previously unheard stories of Ojibwe history, thus empowering and healing her community. We can now hear the story from Ojibwe children’s and a young female’s point of view and witness the power and strength of Ojibwe women, such as Nokomis or Old Tallow who lived with her dogs and died in the embrace of a bear. At no times are the Ojibwe merely victims. Rather, as a family, they find their ways to survive the changing situations by learning, when needed, the ways of the whites, such as reading and writing, and yet resiliently keeping their old ways and traditions alive.

¹⁶ Hall, David E. “Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Jeannette Armstrong (Syilx).” (www.nativeperspectives.net/Transcripts/Jeanette_Armstrong_interview.pdf).

In addition to absent audience and missing the collective anonymity of oral tradition, Native written expression presents also paradox. P. Jane Hafen claims that “[t]he literary traditions of indigenous peoples are, in a real sense, timeless. Basic features and stylistic devices, such as the ritual of oral storytelling, trickster figures, sacredness of place, and fluid time remain largely unchanged.” (17). At the same time, due to European contact, writing, translation and English language expression, many changes have taken place, while tribes have also wanted to preserve the particularity of individual tribal experience and expression. American Indian writers must find their way between the mainstream Western literary canon, the particular oral tradition of their own tribe, and the political discourses of the time in which they live (Hafen 17). Despite some critical voices, as stated below, Erdrich has succeeded well in both maintaining and recreating the Ojibwe storytelling traditions with current motifs and at the same time realizing her own 21st century writing style that appeals to a broad Native and non-Native audience. For example, when recently interviewed for *Elle* by Margaret Atwood, both writers discussed their works in terms of utopian worlds, women’s rights, repressive governments and climate change, finding many common themes in, for example, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* (2017).¹⁷

Sometimes, the position and stand of a Native novelist can also be challenged from within. Owens mentions the example of Leslie Marmon Silko, who at first criticized Louise Erdrich’s novel *The Beet Queen* for not focusing on racism or poverty but the individual’s own psyche as the cause of conflicts and tensions. He points out, however, that Silko’s demand for rhetorical and polemical writing does not allow room for Indian or mixedblood writers to create heterogeneous literature that promotes the richness and varied nature of Indian lives and cultures (OD 206). This same issue is discussed by Alison A. Chapman, who states in her article “Rewriting the Saints’ Lives” that Silko, even if correct about the centrality of individual choice in Erdrich’s vision, partially misrepresents Erdrich, since her “novels are not unaware of political and social pressures,” even if her focus is “on the moments at which specific individuals make specific choices of their own” (165). *The Birchbark House* series does tell individual stories about individual life paths and choices, yet they are still embedded in the history and shared tribal culture and experiences of the Ojibwe. Erdrich’s writing can thus be seen as political by implication without being overly or militantly political. Jace Weaver’s concept of communitism, a combination of “community” and “activism,” signifying a proactive commitment to Native community (AILN 15), well describes Erdrich’s activities in promoting community culture and narrative traditions.

As Clare Bradford states, Indigenous texts do not necessarily engage in open polemics about land and the rights of Indigenous people but rather, their strategy is subtler yet effective: when Indigenous values and worldviews are represented in their writings, they challenge the assumptions and preconceptions of dominant cultures (197). In her *Birchbark House* novels,

¹⁷ Atwood, Margaret and Erdrich, Louise. “Inside the Dystopian Visions of Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich.” *Elle*, 14.11.2017. (www.elle.com/culture/books/a13530871/future-home-of-the-living-god-louise-erdrich-interview/).

Erdrich expresses directly the Ojibwe worldviews and values, for example in the daily routines of the family, and indirectly, through her characters and their life stories, she shows how the assimilation and land policies and politics affected the Ojibwe individuals and their families in the 19th century. Some of Omakayas's family members learn to read and write to better understand the white ways, while others, such as Omakayas herself, focus on maintaining valuable traditions. Omakayas learns healing and storytelling traditions, thus following in the footsteps of Nokomis. Keeping the Ojibwe healing and storytelling tradition alive while everything else in their community is gradually changing is an act of resistance by Omakayas and Nokomis in *The Birchbark House* series.

All in all, the idea of community participation is strongly present in Louise Erdrich's novels, which incorporate the rich traditions of Ojibwe culture into the fabric of her narrative. Such participation becomes visible also in her *Birchbark House* series, for example, by Erdrich's decision to use traditional Ojibwe stories and Ojibwe words and expressions (that she has added as a glossary in her novels) as part of her tales, thus encouraging the reader to find out more about Ojibwe culture and language. To understand all her Ojibwemowin words in *The Birchbark House* series, one needs to look through all her glossaries – her later novels have words that are only explained in the first novels. Erdrich has also added maps and her own illustrations in her novels to further engage the reader and make visible her stories and characters and everyday settings of Ojibwe life. In *Understanding Louise Erdrich*, Seema Kurup sees this as a very powerful act of cultural preservation through the transmittal of communal and personal stories, for the purpose of keeping the language alive for both Native and non-Native readers:

This series offers monumental learning moments not often found in her adult fiction. For example Erdrich's use of the Ojibwe language offers a way of understanding it not offered in the adult fiction. She not only offers context clues and parenthetical references when using Ojibwe words but also provides a glossary so that the meanings are made abundantly clear. (72-73)

Erdrich invites her readers on a journey to find new homes and new homelands. Although the main protagonist of Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series is a female, nevertheless these novels, with their many male characters, both young and old, make them appealing to male audiences as well, and due to their historical links, they are also appealing to those readers who wish to learn more about Ojibwe history. For a younger reader, her *Birchbark House* novels are humorous and at times somewhat sad adventures of a young Ojibwe girl and her family members and animal friends, whereas for a more mature reader, Erdrich opens the everyday life, history and culture of the Ojibwe traveling from Madeline Island in the Chequamegon Bay area of Northeast Wisconsin all the way to the Great Plains of Dakota, yet also reserving the right for strategic silences to maintain the cultural integrity of the Ojibwe. There are many Ojibwemowin words and expressions as well Ojibwe cultural features that are present in the novels, yet the deeper understanding of them is up to the reader – to fully understand the role of trickster, Nanabozho, in the Ojibwe

stories or the ritual meaning of kinnikinnick (red willow tobacco), a more mature reader needs to study Ojibwe culture. Similar to her adult novels, Erdrich lightens her young adult stories with moments of heartfelt laughter even when those moments of humor might be the only stable things in her characters' constantly changing lives. "[...] Indi'n humor enables the participants to laugh and lift their spirits, but it also prepares them to face a sobering reality – the reality of living in a society that privileges whiteness at every turn" (Peterson 165).

The contemporary interest in terms of Native writing lies now "in the Indian defined in terms of Indian ideas and needs" (OD 28), and the Native American novel has become an art form with real-world consequences for Native lives (Teuton 99). In a way, with its great variety of themes, from crime stories to dreamy fantasies, the Native novel both returns to the tradition and reaches for innovations and travel, arguing for national autonomy, cultural persistence, and social pluralism (Teuton 98-99, 100, 103). Also, many of the modern stories not only appeal to the ear but to the eye too – more and more Native illustrators are teaming up with Native writers to give expression to the richness of visual Native culture (Teuton 114). In *The Birchbark House* series, Erdrich visualizes her stories with her own monochromatic illustrations of both children, animals, clothes and different household items that in a simple and accessible manner describe some of the realistic elements of the everyday Ojibwe life in the 19th century. These illustrations reveal another side of Erdrich, namely that of an artist and a sculptor. Marianne Combs writes in her online article "Acclaimed author Louise Erdrich creates interactive exhibit," how in April 2015, Erdrich created her first show of visual art at Bockley Gallery in Minneapolis, close to her bookstore. She had long wanted to have a reading where she does not have to be present, so she created an interactive gallery experience that includes large object sculptures, paintings and audio recordings. As Erdrich describes it: "People can walk in and they can pick up the phones and I can read to them while they're looking at something. I've had such a great time with this." Her gallery experience also includes three large sculptures of women, made from feathers and bones to a miniature birch bark canoe. Her gallery show continues even today online in agencyapophany.com.¹⁸

In this way, many modern Native writers preserve their own cultures by using new forms of communication. Erdrich is a good example of a Native writer who also runs a bookstore and a publishing house and promotes Native language and traditional art preservation. As a blogger and a community developer, she also participates in social and political debates by being well aware of the fragile nature of our present state of survival – Erdrich has included in her bookstore a section on "Green Thinking, Urban Homesteading, Climate Change, The Commons, Indigenous Gardening – all of the topics that I'd love to deny but can't. If we look over the sides of our magic carpets, we'll realize we're floating on thin air."¹⁹ And yet, even if everything goes online these days, in a recent interview for *The New York*

¹⁸ Combs, Marianne. "Acclaimed author Louise Erdrich creates interactive exhibit." *MPRNews*. 17.4.2015. (www.mprnews.org/story/2015/04/17/books-louise-erdrich-gallery).

¹⁹ *Birchbark Books*. Blog. "The Wealth of Nature." (birchbarkbooks.com/blog/tag/The_Wealth_of_Nature/).

Times (“Where to Find Native American Culture and a Good Read,” 25.7.2019), Erdrich also says: “It’s one thing to have algorithms keep suggesting the same books to you, but it’s another thing to walk in. People are looking at you, and you’re looking at actual books, so that you can be inspired and attracted by a physical book.”²⁰

When reading novels by contemporary Native American writers, this requires that especially non-Native readers adopt alternative views that respect the origins of Native stories. In her interview with Martha V. Parravano from The Horn Book Inc., Erdrich mentions the following when asked whether her *Birchbark House* novels are a conscious parallel with Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie*: “The migration across Minnesota into the Dakotas, and the warmth of family life, is something that these books have in common with the Little House series. I am happy that they are being read together, as the Native experience of early western settlement is so often missing in middle-grade history classes.”²¹ In this way, as Hafen states (23), stories are placed in settings that become a trope for identification and the placing of stories mark cultural ties to the land. With her stories of the Native or Ojibwe experience of early Western settlement, Erdrich reclaims the land and the story and provides an alternative view of American history.

However, the question still remains how to approach as an outsider the challenges and possibilities of Native American writing and history, and who has the right to study and write about Native materials? What is ethical and what is not? Is it at all ethical to discuss Native (American) literature or should we rather talk about specific tribal literature, or possibly American literature? How should we cross-read or close read Native literature? And should we focus on individual writers rather than emphasize their tribal affiliations? In *AILN*, Jace Weaver rightfully claims: “If one is to study and write about Native Americans and their literatures, one must be prepared to listen to and respect Native voices and, in keeping with the traditional Native ethic of reciprocity, not take without giving something back (12).”

Another challenging issue for a non-Native reader and writer is the Indigenous terminology and its appropriate usage. A recent publication by Opaskwayak Cree scholar Gregory Younging (*Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*, 2018) proposes answers to some of these complicated questions especially from the Canadian perspective. This concise style guide promotes transmitting Indigenous Peoples’ perspective about themselves instead of the colonial practice of transmitting “information” about Indigenous Peoples (1). Younging especially emphasizes the importance of using precision when talking about Indigenous cultures. “It shows respect by acknowledging the diversity and distinctness of Indigenous Peoples” (91). In chapter six of *Elements of Indigenous Style*, Younging provides a terminology dictionary where guidelines for the usage of different words and terms are presented. For example, the word tribe has an ambiguous status in Canada, whereas it is still used amongst Indigenous

²⁰ Biersdorfer, J.D. “Where to Find Native American Culture and a Good Read.” *The New York Times*. 25.7.2019. (www.nytimes.com/2019/07/25/books/birchbark-minneapolis-native-american-books.html?smid=nytcore-ios-shar).

²¹ Parravano, Martha V. “Five Questions for Louise Erdrich.” The Horn Book Inc. 12.9.2012. (www.hbook.com/?detailStory=five-questions-for-louise-erdrich).

Peoples in the United States (60). According to Younging, the term ritual/ritualistic is “judgemental, Christiancentric, and inappropriate” (59), yet this word is used for example in this thesis by Kimberly Blaeser (Chippewa) as well as Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan). Also, Younging advises avoiding the word myth or tale, since such words indicate that Oral Traditions are insignificant; instead, such expressions as *Oral Traditions* or *Traditional Stories* should be used (57, emphasis original). However, for example, Louis Owens uses the word myth frequently in his writings, as in *Other Destinies*. Younging also emphasizes that although many of the terms used are inappropriate or problematic, they are used habitually even by Indigenous Peoples themselves, when there is no alternate terminology available (52). These few examples show some of the challenges that one may face as a non-Native reader and writer. Younging also reminds his readers that there is an ongoing yet not very consistent reclaiming of original names, such as *Eskimo* (xi).

When analyzing my own position as a non-Native postgraduate student working on Native American materials and when trying to define my standpoint and starting point, I refer to Elvira Pulitano’s thoughts:

As an outsider reading and studying Native American literature, I must continually scrutinize my own position. Rather than looking at these works as self-contained objects whose meaning only needs extracting, I open a dialogue with them and attempt to understand how their narratives speak to my own life experience, to the fact that my culture is different from theirs. And that dialogue does not stop when I stop reading [...]. (117)

Pulitano’s notion of opening a dialogue and embracing differing discourses and worldviews is appealing. As an outsider, I can never fully understand the Native or Ojibwe viewpoint, Native history and Native literature, but neither can I ever completely understand any other person’s point of view or personal history and background, since we all are confined to various degrees in our own physical, mental, emotional and cultural existence, whether Native or non-Native. Thus, I read all literature, Erdrich’s stories included, primarily through my own cultural and individual frame of reference and through my own linguistic landscape. Pulitano (119) refers to Greg Sarris’s (Pomo-Jewish) *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* (1993) and his words: “One says what the other is [...]. No one sees what we do to ourselves and one another. No one sees beyond themselves. Personal and cultural boundaries are rigidified. We don’t see how our worlds are interrelated. We don’t see our very real situations in both worlds.” However, Anishinaabe scholar Basil H. Johnston’s thoughts in Doerfler’s “Conclusion” are very encouraging concerning the flexibility of Native stories. For him, Ojibway stories that are flexible by nature and can adapt to changing circumstances and community needs may embody many meanings that take time and deliberation to appreciate adequately, and they can also be interpreted in multiple ways, without having just one correct way of usage or interpretation. These stories live and change by the way they are told, who tells them and for whom (*Those Who Belong* 94).

While being aware of the fact that as an outsider my understanding of another culture and its stories is always limited, it is also my duty to become

an informed reader of Native literature, to acquaint myself with different Native cultures and their varied worldviews and values. With such action, I as a non-Native reader respect Native cultures as true owners of Native stories, “by recognizing traditions that are fluid yet still retain some kind of continuity with the community that claims them and perceives them as part of its own culture” (AILN 140).

Writing about the so-called Other from outside or inside is always ethically challenging. Wayne C. Booth elaborates in the “Introduction” to *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988) the complexities of such words as “ethical,” or “ethical criticism.” He claims that there is no neutrality in ethical terms; ethical critics are always bound to appraisals of value in their reports and this should be acknowledged by readers or listeners, indicating a need for an ethics of reading as well (8-9). Many Native and non-Native scholars and writers have paid attention to these complex issues. Devon A. Mihesuah (Choctaw) writes in her “Introduction” to *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (1998), how choosing to write about the Other may cause anxiety to the author and how also many Indian writers are nervous about how to use “new methodologies that might accurately present their tribal histories. ‘How would traditionalists recount the past?’ they ask. ‘How can I replicate these unfamiliar storytelling techniques?’” (13) In the light of more essentialist approaches, there may seem to be less space for cross-cultural contacts or, for example, cross-readings of Native materials. This is a situation that Elvira Pulitano regrets: “Any kind of Nativist approach [...] ultimately ends up perpetuating the categories of an us/them universe, merely reversing the terms of the opposition and granting the Indian a privileged position.” (189). Devon A. Mihesuah also mentions how Indian graduate students tend to favor essentialism in an effort to be free from non-Indian influence and how some Indians prefer reading works written only by other Indians (14). She finds it problematic if one does not understand that:

[...] having a command of the canon of the field is the only way to establish a point of departure. If there are problems with previous works about Indians, how can one correct these histories if one hasn’t read them? Conversely, how can the reader recognize incorrect works if she or he doesn’t know the correct versions? (14)

Thus, knowing the Western literary canon and its language might actually work for the Native cause. In *Manifest Manners*, Gerald Vizenor, for his part, sees the English language as not merely the voice to be avoided:

The English language has been the linear tongue of colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, the simulation of tribal cultures, manifest manners, and the unheard literature of dominance in tribal communities; at the same time, this mother tongue of paracolonialism has been a language of invincible imagination and liberation for many tribal people in the postindian world. (105)

Even if Native writers, scholars and critics operate “within the enemy lines,” that is, by using the English language, one might say, quoting Owens, that one can make the master “bear the burden of our own experience,” by

appropriating the other's discourse (*MM* xiii). This theme is further discussed in chapter two.

Yet, the above-mentioned Nativist or traditionalist approach can also mean respecting the variety of Native cultures and their own definitions of change and cultural adaptation. As stated by Chris Teuton in his review of Pulitano's book (337): "While we will continue to change, we also reserve the right to define ourselves any way we wish, including in relation to our political histories and cultural traditions. Critical theory is a part of this process."

Even if non-Native, I can still enjoy and appreciate Erdrich's work, which is based both on her Native background and her European and Western roots. Her writings challenge me to a cultural exchange between Native/Ojibwe and non-Native materials. This deconstruction of monolithic views of culture is also the theme of Mark Shackleton's article "June Walked over It like Water and Came Home," where he writes, "[...] no single cultural code is privileged in Erdrich's work; indeed, the literary and cultural hybridization of her fiction seeks to deconstruct binary categories such as European versus Native" (203). Shackleton concludes by pointing out that Erdrich's writings challenge readers' epistemological assumptions, whether Native or non-Native (203). Reading Erdrich's works requires an open approach, humility and the admission of possible cultural bias. For Daniel Morley Johnson, this means that instead of denying the right for non-Natives to write about Native literature, there is a rightful demand for "a meaningful, informed engagement with Indigenous peoples and their texts" ("(Re)Nationalizing Naanabozho: Anishinaabe Sacred Stories, Nationalist Literary Criticism, and Scholarly Responsibility" in *Troubling Tricksters* 202). This is also clearly expressed by Owens in his *Mixedblood Messages*: "[...] Native Americans are beginning, like other writers, to demand that non-Indian readers acknowledge differing epistemologies, that they venture across a new 'conceptual horizon' to learn to read in new ways" (4). By her *Birchbark House* series, Erdrich engages her readers in an ongoing dialogue that requires the audience's active participation and at the same time, allows them to see the Ojibwe history from a more personal point of view, that of an Ojibwe girl, Omakayas. For example, the hardships experienced by the Ojibwe become visible and personal in Omakayas's and her family's story, while Erdrich also shows the values of the Ojibwe: "The pain and degradation had made Old Tallow stronger, but also kind to the helpless. [...] For how, in that heart treated worse than a dog's, had the capacity for such deep kindness grown?" (*TPY* 179).

All in all, we need to remember when analyzing the development of Native writing how tribal identity has often been defined through the community and represented by multiple narrators as well as by geographic places that represent a political history and linguistic relationship with the land (Hafen 26). In her novels, Erdrich leads her audience through time and space, thus showing the permanent yet evolving Ojibwe relationship to the land and ancient Ojibwe wisdom while also reflecting on the effects of the white man's culture on everyday Ojibwe life. In her *Birchbark House* series, she gives voice to child Omakayas, to girl Omakayas and to woman Omakayas, while traveling with her and her family to new Ojibwe lands, always recreating their existence as needed.

Native writers find the power of their own voice by resisting and reclaiming – "[d]espite violence, disease, institutional attempts at assimilation, through

the imposition of the English language, Indian authors have survived to tell their own stories” (Hafen 26). Without sugar-coating or blaming, but rather with her unique survivance humor, Erdrich creates in her *Birchbark House* an image of a family that keeps together and survives together, using what they need for a better tomorrow. Similarly, Native writers have adjusted, absorbed and reformed white stories, while maintaining their own specific cultural identities.

Having now covered some of the key elements of the Native American writing and the different roles as well as possibilities and challenges faced by Native writers and having analyzed the varied role of Native writers’ audience, I will take a closer look at Native North American children’s and young adult literature as part of Native American literary studies and how related theories have lately been developed.

2. NATIVE AMERICAN LITERARY STUDIES AND THEORY DEVELOPMENT: NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN’S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

In this section of my thesis, I focus on children’s and young adult fiction in Native North American (the US) cultural context and I also discuss this topic in connection with Native American literary studies and theory development.

The present-day definition of children and young adult literature, in its widest sense, includes many forms. As stated by M.O. Grenby in *Children’s Literature*, “Children have consumed, and still consume, a huge variety of material – from fiction to textbooks, from Shakespeare to the scriptures, from verse to advertisements, from picturebooks to computer games. Taken in its widest sense, the term ‘children’s literature’ covers all these forms, and many others.” (2). In relation to the United States, Grenby states: “The United States may have lacked an empire on the European model, but its adventure stories generally affirmed ‘civilised’ America’s right to dominate ‘inferior peoples’ – slaves, Native Americans, the poor – both within and beyond its borders.” (189). Grenby argues that “the recurrent descriptions in children’s literature of white children’s attainment of dominion over foreign lands and indigenous people is a sort of symbolic re-telling of the imperial enterprise” (189). Also, in the 19th century, “the white hero was manifestly destined to exert dominion over the entire continent, no matter how many ‘Indians’ he had to kill in the process. But some also endorsed, either directly or indirectly, the values of the American wilderness and its ‘noble savage’ inhabitants.” (Grenby 191). In *Children’s Literature. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (edited by Peter Hunt), mention is made to colonialism: “Children’s literature itself can be seen as a site of colonialism in that the ‘child’ is both defined and very often silenced in the texts” (3).

In order to go beyond the white-noble savage dichotomy and the idea of a colonized, vanishing Indian, I prefer to take a closer and a more specific look at *The Birchbark House* series not from the point of view of the so-called Western canon or the relatively long history of different Western forms of children's and young adult literature, but rather seeing how *The Birchbark House* series finds its place and can be analyzed in the context of a present-day understanding of Native American (young adult and children's) fiction, emphasizing original, local, diverse and personal stories by Native writers rather than outdated Western stereotypes and often overgeneralizing misinterpretations of Native cultures. Additionally, it is worth noticing that these stories, even if especially meant for children and young adults, belong to the body of Native or in this case Ojibwe storytelling tradition in general and as such they need to be studied as part of Native American or Ojibwe literary studies.

I am also aware that the overall topic of Native American literary studies and theory development in today's world is both a versatile and sensitive matter, characterized by different debates. Also, non-Native scholars and researchers of Native narratives need to constantly ask themselves whose stories and whose truths are they talking about. As mentioned by David Stirrup in *Louise Erdrich*, Native texts, such as myths and legends, have generally been packaged as children's literature or folklore (180). Yet, for Native peoples these stories with their original and open meaning are part of their and their families' lives and worldviews in many ways. Such stories, whether meant for children or for adults, are historically meaningful and truthful – it is less important if they are factual.

For the Anishinabe/Ojibwe tradition, it is important to remember that “Anishinaabeg stories are roots, they are both the origins and the imaginings of what it means to be a participant in an ever-changing and vibrant culture in humanity” (Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark 28). As such, stories provide a foundation and a framework for the field of Anishinaabeg Studies as well as a methodological and theoretical approach. Stories are rich, diverse, vital and complex creations that embody ideas and systems of thought creating the basis for law, values, and community and diverse ways of understanding the world (Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark 28). In this way, one cannot underestimate the importance of stories when talking about the Anishinaabe or Ojibwe worldviews and when trying to understand the Native approach to such concepts as methodology or theory development within Native literary studies.

Native writers, such as Erdrich, write children's fiction to promote the continuation of Native cultures. As Michelle Pagni Stewart states in her article about Erdrich's historical children's fiction, these texts triumph over negative images and mindsets and focus on more culturally sensitive depictions (“‘Counting Coup’ on Children's Literature about American Indians: Louise Erdrich's Historical Fiction” 215). Such cultural sensitivity is also required from a non-Native readership. When studying Native (children's and young adult) stories and narratives one can focus on cultural similarities or differences or one can look at these stories from the point of view of learning: what kind of teachings are there in these stories, but also, for whom are these stories intended? Maybe some of these stories are mainly meant for Native children or young adults, for their educational purposes or honoring their cultural heritage or just for their joy, and not for a larger audience, even if we

as Western readers find them relatively accessible or see them as having some similar points with our own narrative heritage. Native writers, like all writers, reserve the right to define not only their topic and form of their story but also their audience. Nora Murphy mentions in her article “Starting Children on the Path to the Past,” in connection with *The Birchbark House* series, how Erdrich wanted to write her family’s history and honor her mother, Rita Gourneau Erdrich. Murphy adds that Erdrich loves writing about Ojibwe culture and people because that is where her heart is. Erdrich also writes out of a sense of injustice at the historical wrongs Native Americans have suffered: “This was also a way to purge some of the anger that occasionally grips me, as it does most people of Native descent, when I read the history and face ongoing injustice to friends and loved ones.” (Murphy 287).²²

In addition to sensitivity and an array of varied points of views, there are also other issues to be recognized when talking about non-Native and Native writers and theoreticians. Being myself an outsider (despite having some relatives from my mother’s side amongst the Lakota in California), I am not able to take a fully informed stand on these matters and hence, in this thesis, I mainly wish to present different possible angles. In this section of the thesis, one of the works that I shall take a closer look at is Elvira Pulitano’s *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003), which provides an introduction and opening to a discussion on Native American critical theory and is still, after 15 years, one of the most comprehensive works on Native literary theory development yet also presenting views that have been strongly challenged by many Native writers and critics. Pulitano asks whether we can define Native American critical theory, who is ethically entitled to define it, can it be done without “heavy-handed appropriation of the Other” and does “speaking about” mean also “speaking for” (1). Other theoreticians and writers that I will include are for example Louis Owens, Sean Teuton, Lea Zuyderhoudt and Barbara Saunders as well as Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor and David Treuer, who are all Anishinabe/Ojibwe. I also discuss Jace Weaver’s, Craig S. Womack’s and Robert Warrior’s views on American Indian Literary Nationalism, which challenge many of Pulitano’s points. Finally, I take a closer look at for example Michelle Pagni Stewart’s views on Native children’s literature and Clare Bradford’s *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children’s Literature* to see how her analysis and view of postcolonial children’s literature can be applied to Native American children’s and young adult literature and especially Erdrich’s writings.

²² Murphy, Nora. “Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children’s Historical Fiction.” *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284-295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

2.1 THE QUESTION OF POSTCOLONIALISM: DECOLONIZING, DEVICTIMIZING AND RECLAIMING WITH LITERATURE

One of the key starting points in Native American literary analysis is the concept of postcolonialism. Can Native American literary theory function within a “dominant” discourse and define its position among the various “post” isms? Should one as a non-Native critic support a cultural nationalist stance or seek to mediate between different cultures? Also, what is the relationship between Native epistemology and a vital oral tradition and written text? These are some of the questions posed by several researchers, Elvira Pulitano included (3-7). Jace Weaver emphasizes the sovereignty and uniqueness of Native American voices that are more than just a reaction against European literature and the need for specific criteria as far as Native literary criticism goes, Native American literature being “a separate national/local literature from that produced by immigrants” (*AILN* 40). What unites writers like Weaver, Womack and Warrior is the need to avoid generic terminology and to focus on cultural specificity. This has been my own approach in writing this thesis.

Many researchers agree that there is no real “post” yet for many Native societies. For Pulitano, Native American literature still operates in an ongoing process of colonialism, and referring to such researchers as Amy Kaplan and Arnold Krupat, Pulitano agrees that there is not yet any real “post” to the colonial situation of Native Americans. As Krupat (10) puts it, Native American writers are part of “an intensely subversive ideological project.” However, despite the differences in terms of ideological, historical or geopolitical factors, Native American theory and postcolonial strategies are, in Pulitano’s opinion, in an ongoing dialogue, and Native writers and theorists with their (cross)cultural translations, a term used by Homi Bhabha, add new discursive elements to the traditional Western margin-center opposition, and thus to some extent destabilize it (Pulitano 10-12). However, postcolonial thinking, rhetoric and theories are not always appreciated among all Native writers and critics. Jace Weaver, for example, strongly dislikes Western postcolonial theories and the idea of Natives dissolving into a soup of hybridity, as he sees it. Rather, and long before any European encounters, Native cultures have incorporated elements, adopted and adapted from other cultures in order to strengthen their people (*AILN* 29). Weaver also condemns the inclusion of Native American literature within American literature, “thus giving settler colonizers a formal, if not actual, indigeneity, as they trace their national literature uninterrupted back to an autochthonous past” (*AILN* 40).

At all times, when analyzing Native or any other literature for that matter, there lies the risk of (over)generalizing. All individual members of any community are just that, individuals, independent of how globalized our world may be, and these individuals all have an identity that is in the process of constant transitions, in this way challenging fixed definitions or permanent analyses. In my literary analysis or discussion, I can only present a snapshot of any ongoing cultural processes, since I myself too am in the process of

becoming, and all possible analyses by me or by anybody are always to some extent subjective.

As such, any limited views often lead to misunderstandings. As far as Native American children's literature goes, Michelle Pagni Stewart pays attention to our often-flawed historical understanding. In "'Counting Coup' on Children's Literature about American Indians: Louise Erdrich's Historical Fiction," concerning canonic texts about American Indians, she writes:

It might seem easy to dismiss these stereotypical depictions of savage or vanishing Indians, of Indians relegated to the mythic past, of Hollywood-influenced "natives," and of monolithic, generic Indians as reflecting the mindset of the time in which they were written, but these works continue to provide young readers with a flawed historical understanding of the events that have shaped our country's past. (218)

Limited perspectives have also led to too many books on stereotypical American Indians. Stewart states in her chapter "Alive and Well and Reclaiming Their Cultural Voice: Third Generation Native American Children's Literature" in *Ethnic Literary Traditions in American Children's Literature*, referring to Mary Gloyne Byler's words, how there is no lack of children's books on American Indians – rather in the past there have been too many books on painted, whooping, and attacking yet childish Indians, causing trouble to "peaceful" settlers (45). Or, as Devon A. Mihesuah states, "[t]he problem with many books and articles about Indians is not with what is included but what is omitted" (4). Nora Murphy adds that several books that were written by non-Native writers between the 1930s and the 1970s "[...] have taught our children that if Native people existed in Minnesota's past, they were either warlike and disruptive or they lived to serve characters of European descent" (290).²³ Murphy also refers to Cornelia Meigs, considered by some to be the founder of children's historical fiction in the US. Meigs's *Swift Rivers* (1932), however, falsely claims that the Ojibwe people had *chosen* to leave their tribal lands in the 1830s: "The Indians, the peaceable Chippewa, had moved away to dwell beyond the hills in better hunting grounds than these (10)." (290-291; emphasis original).²⁴ In *The Birchbark House* series, even if the treaties still somewhat secured the way of life for the Ojibwe in the Midwest and the U.S. government had only begun its aggressive push westwards (Kurup 72), Omakayas's family is forced to leave their ancestral lands and move west because of white settlers. Murphy further laments that even that the "1990s saw an upsurge in interest in historical fiction for children and

²³ Murphy, Nora. "Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children's Historical Fiction." *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284-295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

²⁴ Murphy, Nora. "Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children's Historical Fiction." *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284-295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

adults, much of this recent fiction continues to subordinate Native peoples' experiences in Minnesota history" (294).²⁵

Of course, the Ojibwe were not merely the victims pushed by white settlers. As David Stirrup mentions: "The Ojibwe had been a very powerful force, benefiting from close alliance with the French and more or less aggressively moving westward before this moment, while the Seven Fires Prophecy locates these events *within* Ojibwe patterns of knowledge, rather than presenting the Ojibwe simply as victims of external actions." (187, emphasis original). This is also described in *The Game of Silence*: "'There was a time when we had no quarrel with the Bwaanag [Lakota and Dakota],' said Deydey. 'They lived in their part of the world and we in ours. We even traded with them. But as the chimookomanag push us, so we push the Bwaanag. We are caught between two packs of wolves.'" (21).

As Michelle Stewart points out in "Counting Coop," stereotypical children's literature on Native Americans has unfortunately endured. Many "beloved" and indeed well-written works have been passed down from generation to generation, despite the fact that they can be racist, one-sided and carrying negative stereotypes. In some cases these "classics" have been a catalyst for Native writers. Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve (Sioux), who is well-known for her trickster stories and her childhood memoirs, explains that while she originally planned to write for adults, she decided instead to focus on a younger audience when her daughter began to read *Little House on the Prairie*. These novels emphasized Indians' nakedness, their smell, and their fierce demeanor, and Sneve wished to challenge such negative markers by writing her own stories about contemporary American Indian children (Stewart 218-219). Murphy points out that Erdrich herself found that the series *Little House on the Prairie* presented a distorted view of settlers entering a supposedly empty land when in fact they took the land from the Natives. One of Erdrich's aims in writing *The Birchbark House* series was to broaden her readers' views on this matter ("Starting Children" 287).²⁶

Clare Bradford in *Unsettling Narratives* has taken a close look at the children's literature produced in the former settler colonies of New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States and points out, how in such fiction, children are often treated as a dehistoricized and homogenized group, spoken for by adults. Bradford also claims that "non-Indigenous texts are much more likely than Indigenous texts to recycle the unquestioned assumptions of dominant cultures and their ingrained beliefs and convictions about Indigenous peoples and cultures." (226). Erdrich, however, gives strong, individual voices in her *Birchbark House* series to children, such as Omakayas and her brother Pinch, thus decolonizing and rehistoricizing, with a novelist's freedom, the Ojibwe stories of the past, where women or children have rarely been seen or heard as the owners of their stories. Similarly, as Michelle Pagni Stewart claims, there are writers like Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki), whose

²⁵ Murphy, Nora. "Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children's Historical Fiction." *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284-295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

²⁶ Murphy, Nora. "Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children's Historical Fiction." *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284-295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

historical fiction novels, such as *Sacajawea* (2000), *Hidden Roots* (2004), *The Winter People* (2002) and *March toward the Thunder* (2008), seek to reclaim Native stories and histories beyond any Hollywood perspective and well-loved but stereotyped stories about Native Americans (“Alive and Well” 46).

Native literature and Native children’s and young adult literature can, of course, also be analyzed from the point of view of postcolonial writing. Clare Bradford argues that children’s texts operate and are created in settler cultures with often conflicting discourses with both colonial and anti-colonial strategies. These writings address colonial themes through realistic or fantastic history, Native and non-Native encounters, through characters of mixed ancestry and “through metaphysical and symbolic treatments of colonization” (3). For Bradford, the colonial past is present in power relations, modes of representation, national identity myths and governing systems, and how postcolonial societies project their future can be seen in contemporary children’s literature (4). She emphasizes that indigenous texts deserve to be read in the light of the Native cultures in which they are produced, rather than from within the assumptions of Western culture and textual practices (227). In this thesis, such a view is actualized in the creation of a tool for literary analysis, called Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, which emphasizes the importance of local and specific when analyzing Native stories.

Bradford states that from the 1980s till now Indigenous peoples have increasingly addressed the manifold colonial legacies through children’s literature, with more Indigenous publishers with their own cultural and political agendas in Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia that see the importance of children’s texts in the process of socialization and remind us of the importance of the local and the particular (4-5). Erdrich’s Birchbark Books in Minneapolis strongly promotes Native children’s and young adult literature and on their web page she calls her local bookshop a teaching bookstore. “Our bookstore has a tiny loft and a ‘hobbit hole’ for children to play in and read while only feet away there is intellectual food for grown-ups – books, books, books.”²⁷

On the other hand, while recognizing the colonial past, it is needed, according to Lea Zuyderhoudt, to not only focus on the history of colonialism but on “[...] the revival and recognition of Native American cultures” in Native American studies, to see “[...] the incredible dynamics and creativity of Native American cultural life” (17) and “[...] do justice to the cultural richness and diversity of different perspectives and traditions next to each other. Native American perspectives are obviously as diverse as academic ones.” (18). Colonialism and its traces may still be there but are countered by the creative dynamics and powerful survival, or survivance (Gerald Vizenor’s term), of the non-Vanishing Indians, shown for example by the great amount of Native literature produced yearly, both in English and in local languages. For example, in 2010, Louise Erdrich set up with her sisters Heid E. and Angela Erdrich Wiigwaas Press, the publishing arm of the Birchbark House Fund. The books published by Wiigwaas Press are in Ojibwemowin and the aim of Erdrich’s venture is to support the preservation and revitalization of Native

²⁷ *Birchbark Books*. “Our Story.” (birchbarkbooks.com/ourstory).

languages. “*Wiigwaas*, or birch bark, seemed an appropriate name; the durable bark once served as the medium for delivering messages.”²⁸

At best, Native American critical theory and modern storytelling can present new, valid discursive strategies inside and outside of any postcolonial discourse. As Pulitano sees it, Native American scholars do more than just create a theory of their own, “[...] they have also begun to redefine – more creatively and more subversively than their European counterparts – the boundaries of Western, Eurocentric theory itself, shifting their attention from a monologic, authoritative form to a dialogic, crosscultural perspective.” (16-17). The idea is to change the situation, where “[...] if they are to be taken seriously, Native American critics must be familiar with the work of Bhabha and Spivak, but Bhabha and Spivak need not be familiar with the work of Native American critics.” (Pulitano 130). As Lea Zuyderhoudt expresses this, in connection with present-day fieldwork in Native American societies, “[...] in the past the researcher rather than the researched could dictate processes of exchange” but now we need to listen and co-operate with those involved (16). There is a need to redress the power balance in the field of Native American studies, so that authority is given to Native American critics and their views on theory as they see it. It is time to appreciate their multiple and at times even contradictory views so that Native American writers and Native American literary critics are the ones who formulate their agendas and the Others – the non-Natives for a change – need to carefully hear and listen.

Sean Teuton uses the term “the Red Power novel,” referring to the movement that sees Native peoples not as helpless victims of colonization but as talented protectors of their Indigenous thought by practicing the old ways yet inventing also new modes of thought (74). Red Power novels, such as Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, reinterpret colonizing conclusions and recover tribal knowledge, experience and tribal identity (Teuton 94). Similarly, as Simon J. Ortiz confirms in his Foreword to Weaver, Womack and Warrior’s *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, there is a need for Indigenous poets, novelists, playwrights, critics and storytellers to address the true issues of Indigenous cultures, “We have to; there is not much choice” (xiii).

In this way, literature can work as a form of decolonization – Native American critics have derived models from communal truths that help nations to recover from near-genocide by raising consciousness, sensitizing non-Native readers to inaccurate histories and destructive stereotypes that many Native children have internalized. At its best, Native American Studies promote Native literature as a process of decolonization, nurturing Indigenous nations in all their variety and diversity (Teuton 82). Teuton argues that in the past, Native novels of resistance cultivated social consciousness and acted against assimilation, but today resistance does not mean rejecting education, or avoiding living in a city or traveling around the world, rather these acts work as a new form of resistance, shaking up stereotypical preconceptions about Native peoples (87).

²⁸ LeMay, Konnie. “Literature the Ojibwe Way: Erdrich Sisters’ *Wiigwaas* Press Helps Preserve Ojibwemowin.” *Indian Country Today*, 29.12.2011. (newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/erdrich-sisters-wiigwaas-press-helps-preserve-ojibwemowin-lqo4WYgVoUK_1-Ku_Jfyfg/).

Similarly, children's and young adult literature has an important role to play in enculturating children and young people as members of societies and nations. In *Louise Erdrich*, David Stirrup mentions Erdrich's role as an educator, storyteller and an entertainer and how the pedagogic quality of her children's books is paramount. "As elders are instructing their younger, so we as readers are being instructed in the history of mid-nineteenth-century Ojibwe, still semi-nomadic but clearly touched by white society." (183). However, if these works are read in the context of the dominant discourse, there is a risk that they "are too readily regarded as lesser versions of majority textuality" (Bradford 227). Hence, as informed representations of Native cultures, Native children's and young adult literature deserves to be read and analyzed in the context of the culture in which it is produced and as a part of Native narrative tradition. Therefore, also in this thesis, the focus is on the Native, or more precisely the Ojibwe world of Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, analyzed with the dialogic tool of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, rather than any general Western discourse of children's and young adult literature.

What is then the role and purpose of non-fiction and historical novels for children in settler cultures? Bradford claims that "non-fiction writing by Indigenous authors constitutes a prominent mode of production for children in the United States, including autobiography, biography, and historical accounts of the experience of individuals and communities" (50). She further states that historical children's novels in settler cultures try to explain and interpret national histories involving invasion, violence and assimilation, which can be challenging. There is a varying degree of historicity to these novels, yet they are not history – they select and shape the events to serve their narratives (97). At the same time, she also questions whether one should use such Western terms as prose, realism or poetry as universals when categorizing Indigenous writings (50). The novels in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series are written in realist-historical "prose," yet they are also fictionalized biography for young adults based on historical yet adapted characters in partly imaginary settings. Stirrup (184) mentions how "[a]longside Omakayas's own historicity one further aspect of this historical contextualisation is worth mentioning, and this is the degree to which Erdrich draws on other texts in order to map out the detail." Erdrich mentions how her material is derived from conversations with elders on Madeline Island and her own textual research, for example in connection with an 1847 smallpox epidemic, the Catholic mission by Father Baraga or Cadotte, the trader (Stirrup 184).

If different Western genres are problematic when applied to non-Western narratives, so are the common Western notions of literary quality. Bradford points out how children's literature is usually evaluated based on, for example, such aspects as how round the characters are, how convincing their settings and character building, and how these writings should not be overly didactic. Since these notions are Western notions of literary quality, they are problematic when applied in non-Western cultural contexts, such as Native writings (15-16). Native young adult literature in settler societies is not free from discursive pressures. On one hand, there are "the socializing agendas that influence the production of books for children" and "the dominant discourses that constitute cultural givens" and on the other hand, there are "the counter-discourses that seek to undermine them" (Bradford 24). These pressures

complicate the writing process of Native young adult literature, creating ambivalence and ambiguity – how can postcolonial anxieties and uncertainties be combined with positive character models or desirable plot outcomes (Bradford 24). Or how to create a story where the modern audience can participate as in traditional Ojibwe storytelling.

In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, despite the growing effects of colonization on Ojibwe life and culture, Omakayas and her family are presented as historical subjects and with their detailed survival stories, Erdrich devictimizes and reclaims the Ojibwe past and adds new, previously unheard voices to the colonial narratives, even if partly fictional. Yet, we need to consider that at times texts written by Indigenous writers are not always "better" representations of Native cultures – at times some Indigenous people may have internalized the colonizer's ideology or their representations do not include the great variety of Indigenous lives and lifestyles (Bradford 11-12). This is, however, not the case with Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, where she, despite her own challenges in terms of the Ojibwe language, depicts in great detail the richness of a strong Ojibwe culture with its values, worldviews and changing yet surviving and resilient lifestyles. Albeit all changes, Omakayas is a survivor: "Nothing would ever take the place of her original home, but Omakayas also loved this place." (TPY 181). Stirrup also describes Omakayas as a transformer, who has been the sole survivor of the smallpox epidemic on Spirit Island and whose inner life and experiences, "as she discovers, develops, and matures," are central in *The Birchbark House* series (185).

As part of the above-mentioned decolonization process, to quote Stewart, Native authors need to undo many misrepresentations and stereotypes of Native cultures that the publishing industry might still cling to and that are deeply ingrained in the social consciousness ("Alive and Well" 48). When writing to children using a style that is more found in American Indian books for adults, therein lies the risk that unknowing reviewers may misunderstand what the author is doing, without truly seeing the rich literary traditions underlying these stories ("Alive and Well" 48). Additionally, when Ojibwe stories and expressions are translated into English, they might start to appear as romanticized clichés of Indians embedded in nature, giving for a Western reader an impression of unsophisticated narrative register. This has been discussed for example by David Stirrup in *Louise Erdrich*, when he critically analyzes the dialogue between Nokomis and Omakayas (189-190). Erdrich helps her audience with her notes, drawings, maps and glossaries included in *The Birchbark House* series, so if desired, the reader has a chance to gain knowledge and information on many levels. Stirrup mentions: "[I]n Erdrich's young adult fiction Ojibwe words and phrases remain untranslated in the body of the text, leaving the reader free to use the glossary at the back of the book. The pedagogic intent behind this is apparent [...]." (190).

As seen in the later chapters of this thesis, Erdrich's writing intersects with deep ecology, writing back to Western anthropocentric worldviews, and reflecting her own Ojibwe history and culture for the benefit of her own people (such as urban Ojibwe youth), while also teaching present and future generations of Native (and non-Native) people. Her Birchbark Books and Native Arts store in Minneapolis, with its language- and culture-preserving activities, serves the needs of her Native community, while also educating non-

Natives on Ojibwe life, history and values. With her writings, Erdrich includes her readers in her story circle by helping them with maps, glossaries and intimate drawings that defy the solemn, grave and one-dimensional photos of for example Edward Curtis, and in this way she encourages her readership to participate in her story. Yet, it is good to remember that even if a postcolonial writer wishes to be read by a broad or varied audience, it does not mean that all the readers may share the same degree of intimacy with the story – Native writers have the right for omissions and strategic silences to honor their own cultures (Bradford 16). Also, by using a Native language, such as Ojibwemowin in *The Birchbark House* series, a Native writer like Erdrich confirms the ownership of the story. By using Ojibwemowin, Erdrich also traces back to her own language roots. She explains in the online interview with *TeachingBooks* (23.10.2009), how she struggles with Ojibwemowin, since it is not her first language. “I was taught by German nuns, so I spoke a lot of German as a child. [...] I have a very mixed background, and I feel there's a huge paucity of knowledge in my life about the Ojibwa language and culture. So, I keep trying to add to it.”²⁹

According to Bradford, Indigenous texts are primarily produced for the Indigenous readers, young adult literature included, and for non-Natives they are both “comprehensible and emblematic of alterity” – at best such literature can provide a way for cultural understanding for younger citizens in colonized societies (69). Bradford adds how during the last couple of decades many Indigenous authors and illustrators have produced texts on journeys by Indigenous children and youth, texts that so far have been “outside the schemata of colonial narratives of settlement and adventure” (148). This is the case with *The Birchbark House* series as well. Colonial narratives have not traditionally included the voices of Native children or the elderly in their white male dominated settler stories, whereas *The Birchbark House* novels focus on strong, surviving Ojibwe individuals who find together, as a family, their new ways of being, even in the midst of all the challenges, such as diseases, loss of ancestral lands and traditional life styles as well as cultural struggles.

2.2 ENGLISH WITH A LOWER-CASE E, HEALING OUR TONGUES AND REVITALIZING NATIVE TRADITIONS

In addition to using their Native tongues, Native writers of today also maintain and recreate their Indigenous narrative traditions by using the English language and modifying different Western forms of literary expression to convey their message. In *Manifest Manners*, Louis Owens talks about Native survival and “a growing recognition of the subversive survival of indigenous Americans” (4) who use english, with a lower case *e*, and turn it against the center and demand non-Indian readers to learn about other epistemologies, other horizons, other paradigms and other myths, to read “on our terms,

²⁹ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

though within the language of the colonizer's terminology" (7). The writers of Native literature maintain a sense of their Indigenous heritage by not only translating the Native texture into "english," but "also through a careful manipulation of English syntax" and trying to bring across the feelings of one language into another, as seen through tribal eyes (*MM* 7).

For Owens, the words within a Native epistemology are deeply interconnected with the natural world we inhabit, and they have the power to alter the world for good or bad (*MM* 209). As an example of mapping and renaming, Owens mentions the Glacier Peak Wilderness and the mountain called Glacier Peak, in the state of Washington. For the Suiattle people, this peak is "Dakobed," "Great Mother," a place the local Indian people "look to see where they came from" (*MM* 211). As Seema Kurup points out, in terms of the Ojibwemowin, language for the Ojibwe was and is more than just means of communication: "Naming ceremonies, healing songs, and teaching stories were all conveyed in the language: the names have meanings, the songs are personal mantras, and the stories are part of the healing process. Language is inextricably tied to history and place for the Ojibwe; losing it could have devastating consequences." (75). In her *Birchbark House* series, Erdrich tells stories about such naming ceremonies, healing songs and healing stories that are needed for Omakayas and her family to survive the harsh winters and other setbacks. At the same time, she practices her own Ojibwemowin skills and in this way keeps her cultural Ojibwe heritage alive. These points are described in detail in chapter four.

Language has also been a tool for the colonizers, "[...] to conquer and to silence, to erase the indigenous people of the continent, to ensure that they are subsumed into what Owens calls 'Euramerica'" (Pulitano 126). And yet, despite this, Native people have survived and appropriated the dominant discourse; Native writers have been crosswriting their novels and with various degrees of directness obliged their readers to engage in cross-reading. In this way, non-Native readers have been provided a valuable chance to reconsider their beliefs and worldviews and to stretch their conceptual horizons and epistemological understandings (Pulitano 127). In Erdrich's novels, the trickster figure Nanapush is a clear example of an Indian elder who uses the colonizer's language and the Jesuit education that has been forced upon him to promote the positive transformation and empowerment of not only himself but his people. Similarly, Omakayas's father and other family members realize the importance of understanding the white man's writing as a tool to protect their tribal interests. The stories of traditional trickster Nanabozho are part of Omakayas's life as well in *The Birchbark House* series. Stories about Nanabozho and his adventures are Omakayas's favorite ones when told by her grandmother. For example, in *The Birchbark House*, Nanabozho and Muskrat make the Earth, and Nokomis reminds Omakayas how important even the efforts of a small being, such as a muskrat, are (172-175).

In the Anishinaabe context, words, stories and literature are one. Basil H. Johnston, who was a respected Ojibwe elder and scholar, describes in "Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature" his language and how language and literature are not separate from one another but belong together: "In my tribal language, all words have three levels of meaning: There is the surface meaning that everyone instantly understands. Beneath this meaning is a more fundamental meaning derived from the prefixes and their combinations with other terms.

Underlying both is the philosophical meaning.” (6). Johnston adds: “The stories that make up our tribal literature are no different from the words in our language. Both have many meanings and applications, as well as bearing tribal perceptions, values, and outlooks.” (7). Similarly, Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series may be categorized in Western terms as young adult literature but these novels are not children’s or young adult literature in the sense of lacking in cultural and historical depth. Rather, they are an extensive source of Ojibwe culture with tribal values, worldviews, ethics and traditions that require in-depth reading. Erdrich has also described the Ojibwe language, Ojibwemowin, in the following manner in her interview with *TeachingBooks*: “Objects in Ojibwa are either animate or inanimate. [...] There are long stories that go with every word. And every word in Ojibwa has a spirit that goes with it and a history that goes to it.”³⁰ Similarly, when talking about the meaning of *aki* or land, earth and soil, James Vukelich reminds his listeners that since *aki* or land is an inanimate noun in the Ojibwe language, concepts like Mother Earth that can be used for example in Dakota language are not used as such in Ojibwemowin to avoid syntax error. Rather, when addressing the earth, for example during tobacco offerings, the Ojibwe address lakes or rivers but they are not actually praying to the earth. Instead, they are acknowledging that the earth has a spirit, that the lakes and rivers have a spirit and that water has a spirit. In this way, they acknowledge their relationship to that spirit. The names for the spirits vary, depending on the Ojibwe dialects, each word having a great depth of knowledge.³¹

As it is obvious by now, there are different ways to revitalize the power of Native discourse, and in Erdrich’s novels, oral tradition is translated onto paper, and the same healing, sense of solace and teaching of the possibility of a more harmonious and balanced relationship with nature/land that took place around the tribal fires and in traditional storytelling moments can now support her readers over and over again and reach a wider, even global audience as well as reconnect younger and older with a nature or land experience they might have forgotten or never even had. Seema Kurup states, how through her *Birchbark House* novels, Erdrich is giving her readers an introductory lesson in Ojibwe language: “By including a glossary of terms with phonetic pronunciations at the end of the book and providing context clues or parenthetical translations throughout the text, Erdrich preserves and records the language.” (74). Transcribing Ojibwe language is an important step in recording it for generations to come (Kurup 74).

Elizabeth Gargano refers to a 1985 interview where Louise Erdrich describes how she loves the sacred stories of traditional Ojibwa culture that form an interrelated whole, even of separate tales, and how such an aesthetic model has inspired her own writing. These stories are dynamic by nature and can combine continuity with new elements and innovations (29). As far as *The Birchbark House* series is concerned, Gargano argues that Erdrich creates histories that are also revitalizing cultural texts. Their cyclical narratives, as in her first two *Birchbark House* novels of *The Birchbark House* and *The Game*

³⁰ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

³¹ Vukelich, James. Online teachings: (www.youtube.com/channel/UCFk1tCJQEH_BP4Kw6ckr4YQ).

of *Silence*, interweave daily experiences with traditional trickster and other stories, “illuminating the regenerative powers of traditional Ojibwa storytelling” (30). Erdrich also expands the mental universe of her novels by adding Ojibwemowin expressions and words for the reader to get a taste of another worldview, and she interrupts her storyline with self-contained yet embedded traditional tales of, for example, tricksters or windigos, and she continuously weaves her story landscapes with flexible cyclical story structures, emphasizing more community than the individual and preserving old meanings but also giving space for new. Later in her series, when Nokomis is gone, Omakayas takes her grandmother’s place as the family storyteller and healer. And another circle and cycle is about to start.

Another theme in postcolonial and Native American literature, young adult literature included, is the notion of writing back. Applying early postcolonial concepts, Owens finds that the truly interesting literature of today is part of “writing back towards the decayed center,” and “at the heart of this emergence,” there is American Indian writing with “[...] its anger, humor, bitterness, beauty, feuding and deep sense of a real subject [...]” (*MM* xv). In Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series, the “real subject” is Omakayas and her family whose story talks back towards the white-dominated center of Ojibwe history writing. In addition, Erdrich’s writing has been compared to that of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* books, seeing Erdrich’s stories as cultural counterpoint to a romanticized view on the western expansion movement, perpetuating the image of the savage Indian troubling the frontier of America.

In “Counting Coup” (216, 229), Stewart does see certain parallels between these two writers’ youth series, such as telling about the daily life of a young girl and her family and both Laura and Omakayas shun women’s work, are jealous of their older sister, and are part of a loving family that overcomes hard times. However, Erdrich’s writings challenge the negative stereotypical images of Native Americans that have, until more recently, pervaded children’s literature, by celebrating more culturally sensitive and conscious depictions and by turning around the events, such as the traditional captive narratives where the Indians usually take fair maidens captive. In Erdrich’s version, Omakayas’s son Chickadee is captured by Michif brothers. Stewart in “Counting Coup” (215) mentions two interviews with Louise Erdrich where Erdrich responded to questions whether she is writing back to Wilder’s books by telling how she and her children had read those books and loved their warmth and humor but were disturbed by Ma’s racism and the way the newcomers took the land from the Natives. Hence, she wished her own writings would enlarge the view presented in Wilder’s books. Wilder sees the “frontier” as something exotic and dangerous, whereas for Omakayas and her family that wild frontier is home.

Nora Murphy also discusses the theme of the *Little House* books in her *Minnesota History* article “Starting Children on the Path to the Past.” She sees historical fiction as a powerful educational tool able to recreate the past for its readers. Especially young readers who are still learning to see fact from fiction can easily acquire an inaccurate and biased picture of the region’s past by the skillfully crafting authors and deny the value and role of Native people in the

Midwest (286).³² Hence, as also mentioned by Kurup (73), *The Birchbark House* series functions “as a corrective prequel to the Little House series: Erdrich is not revising the account of the frontier of popular Western imagination; she is presenting the lived history of an indigenous people.” Erdrich herself has mentioned this matter in the interview with *TeachingBooks*:

“[T]here’s also inherent racism in the structure of the Wilder books themselves: the simple acceptance of the fact that the Little House characters could just go along and take whatever they wanted and that the native people were apparently vanishing into the sunset. The natives were portrayed as vanishing people who were going to go away. And that’s all that one could feel about them.”³³

These questions of stereotypes and simplified and even false narratives are interlinked with the difficult question of ownership and voice. Zuyderhoudt pays attention to this issue in Native American communities and the paradoxical situation where Native Americans “[...] were initially not taken seriously as experts on their own way of life and that they were later not taken seriously as producers of it” (14). In terms of Native literature and its research, it goes without saying that the voice of an informed Native writer as an expert of his or her own literature and his or her own present-day community must be respected. Jace Weaver writes in *AILM* (12): “Too often non-Native critics have no real knowledge of, let alone commitment to, Native communities. They simply want to read Native texts, without ever engaging, let alone encountering, Native peoples.” Also, James Mackay (675–676, 679) discusses these topics in his review essay on Native American literary theory. Mackay emphasizes that European critics carry an extra responsibility to carefully choose their words and works and be aware of their own marginal position in Native discourse. After all, the idea of Natives doing fiction and Europeans doing interpretation is but false.

Similarly, when we talk about Native young adult literature, traditional narratives with interwoven cultural values and beliefs become reduced or distorted when removed from their original context, and Native stories should no longer be appropriated. This also means that Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* stories need to be analyzed as Ojibwe literature, not just Native literature, since this is the purpose of the writer. Also, Indigenous people know best what stories should be told and by whom and in which version (Bradford 51). This also means respecting the fact that there can be and there are several different voices within the contemporary Native (literary) communities that non-Native audiences need to be aware of. Possibly in this way, we can start seeing less “through a distorting lens, the ‘glass wall’ of Western European culture” (*We Have the Right to Exist* 78), as Wub-e-ke-niew (Anishinaabe Ojibwe) puts it.

Also, one might rightfully question the whole term “Native American literature,” as mentioned earlier. It might serve some purpose as a common

³² Murphy, Nora. “Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children’s Historical Fiction.” *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284–295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

³³ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

term in an academic curriculum, like such generalizing terms as European literature or Australian literature, as long as we remember that the first two words of this term are actually invented and refer to writers with multiple tribal and national identities and personalities that demand individual attention and that the third word may also challenge any normative Western views of literature. David Treuer has also strongly commented on the term “Native American literature” and its dilemma of authenticity in *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual* (2006). He writes:

This book does not seek to define what is or what should be seen as Native American literature and is not involved with the new essentialist project of defining only texts in Native American languages as authentic Indian texts and those in English merely fantasies in the conqueror’s language. Rather, this is a book about interpretation: about what is gained and what is lost when we interpret Native American fiction with more stress placed on “Native” than on “fiction.” (5)

American Indian Literary Nationalism also challenges any cohesive Euromerican reality – who are these Europeans or what is Eurocentric discourse? (128)

To summarize, Native American literature (and its studies) is as complex and diverse by nature as any other form of literature. Therefore, any culturally narrow approaches to Native American studies need to be challenged – Lea Zuyderhoudt writes in “Responding to Native American Voices” how the complex matrix of Native American cultures involving tradition, continuity and change, demands that Native American people must be taken “[...] seriously as experts on and producers of their own way of life” (14). As informed representations of Native cultures, also Native children’s and young adult literature, such as Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series, deserves to be read and analyzed in the context and from the point of view of the culture in which they are produced. For Craig Womack, “one size fits all” is not an option – instead we need to call for individuality, artistry, vision, deviance, innovation and Indians deciding for themselves (*AILN* 103). Therefore, also in this thesis, the focus is on Ojibwe-related readings of Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series rather than the general Western view of children’s and young adult literature. Special emphasis is given to Ojibwe culture with its different aspects and this becomes visible in the notion of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, when later used as a tool of analysis in chapter four.

2.3 SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT: COMMUNITY WITH MULTIPLE NATIVE VOICES

As there are more and more Native writers of different backgrounds, such as Louise Erdrich, Paula Gunn Allen, Greg Sarris, Louis Owens and Gerald Vizenor, there are also a great variety of approaches to the narratives of Native American oral tradition and Native epistemology, based on different Native American cultural and intellectual traditions. These authors, among others,

apply different tools when approaching Indigenous rhetoric or Native and Western literary analysis.

Louise Erdrich has said in several interviews, such as with Laura Coltelli in *Winged Words* (47-48), that her first audience is other Native readers. Her stories for young adults provide valuable information also for those more urbanized Ojibwe youngsters, who are not very familiar with their cultural heritage and history. In this way, *The Birchbark House* saga can educate both Native and non-Native readers, both young and adults. Seema Kurup writes how “for the Ojibwe traditions, spiritual beliefs, cultural attitudes, ways of interacting with nature, everyday life, crisis management, healing, and tribal history are passed through storytelling. In this way *The Birchbark House* is not storytelling for its own sake but is an effort to keep alive the rich history of the Ojibwe.” (74). In addition, as Kimberly Blaeser describes, besides human connections, unfolding of seasons and how other creatures have survived the harsh winters, storytelling has supported the physical survival of Chippewa ancestors, that survival being today more of spiritual, emotional and personal nature, characterized by peer support and being in a community (Andrews 10).

Whether Native authors decide to rewrite or reclaim their tribal histories or wish to address more contemporary themes and whether they have young or old readers as their main audience, there are many things to fight for or undo, from getting published to challenging the still prevalent ideas presented in movies, social media or literature with misrepresentations. These writers need to swim against the current and find their own genre with their own stylistic devices, their own story rhythm, and they need to consider whether to compromise or not, whether to go safe or to choose some less travelled paths. Since Louise Erdrich is today a household name, she has creative freedom to write the way she truly wants, and she will get published. The situation is still different for those less known Native American writers who struggle to be heard and accepted as part of any 20-Native-American-Writers-You-Need-To-Read lists.

On the other hand, Native and non-Native writers need to analyze Western writings about Native people as well. As Devon A. Mihesuah (Choctaw) points out, “Indians are not the only persons with knowledge about Indians. Not all Indians have been taught all aspects of their histories and cultures, let alone been thoroughly trained in historical and anthropological theories and methodologies.” (13-14). Therefore, there is a place for cross-reading and cross-writing, a polyvocal dialogue between equal participants, even if such equality is not yet fully attained due to power imbalances. Moreover, when promoting cross-reading within Native (literary) studies, it is worth remembering the relatively recently (self)identified group of “mixed blood” Native writers and literary critics, who are active both in the field and in the academic world. They are potentially able to create some of the needed harmony and open balance in the Native field of research and Native literary studies in particular, since they have access to both Native and non-Native cultural materials. Louise Erdrich is a good example of a contemporary Native cross-writer – she engages both Natives and non-Natives in a cultural dialogue through her writings, and her novels, such as her *Birchbark House* series, appeal to younger and older audiences alike. She is also socially and politically active, using what might be considered new forms of storytelling, such as different online media and blogs. And yet, such dialogue does not need to lead

to unwanted or destructive cultural loss for the Native people. Rather, as stated in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* by Jace Weaver, pluralist separatism, which means respecting the great variety of 550 federally recognized tribes (46), can promote the cause of sovereign Native nations, while engaging in dialogue with the non-Native world. Similarly, the notion of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue of this thesis respects the uniqueness of Ojibwe culture and worldview.

Native writers are naturally operating as part of their communities, and Pulitano refers to the complex and complicated question of “how effectively Native American authors working in the safe space of an academic institution commit themselves to their Native communities” (138). She discusses the multitude of Native communities – there is no single “ideal” Native community all Native writers can identify with. As Louis Owens sees it, even if “[...] Native American intellectuals cannot always speak to the economically, racially, and politically oppressed people on reservations [...] they can speak about and against their dangerous and denigrated positions inside the dominant culture.” (Pulitano 139).

Erdrich’s voice speaks for a realist Ojibwe his/herstory. With her *Birchbark House* series Erdrich reclaims and retells the past not from a generic Native American point of view but from the Ojibwe point of view and from the point of view of Ojibwe youth and her own family. She tells realistically, in an empowering and detailed manner, about the Ojibwe life in the 19th and early 20th century, both in the lake region and in the Great Plains. She tells about the losses of land, diseases, joys and sufferings, stories, families and traditions and the changes of times that Omakayas and her family experience in their everyday life. Nothing is generic, nothing is sugar-coated, and nothing is stereotyped or romanticized. Yet, at the same time, it is partly fictional too.

While learning more about Native cultures and worldviews, we may also keep in mind David Treuer’s thoughts when he claims that “[i]t is crucial to make a distinction between reading books as culture and seeing books as capable of *suggesting* culture” (5, emphasis original). Treuer encourages us to leave aside, even if only for a moment, the questions of authenticity and identity and study Native American fiction also as *literature*, as fiction with style (3, 5; emphasis original). Erdrich’s novels can also be seen as stories suggesting the history of the Ojibwe – they are after all fiction and tell stories of individuals, as seen through Erdrich’s creative freedom as a novelist. A similar point is mentioned by David Stirrup in section 2.4.

When different Native publications continue to grow in numbers, there need to be space and appreciation for different voices. In *Mixedblood Messages*, Owens talks, with great satisfaction, about the dynamic development of the Native American novel from “a broad cross-section of the Native American population” (xiv), and the many critical studies, theses and dissertations on Native American literature. Such development is also appreciated by Heid E. Erdrich, an Anishinaabe poet-critic, who writes in her article “Name’ Literary Ancestry as Presence,” referring to Robert Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (xvi), how “[t]wenty-five years ago, building a library of America Indian writers from books in print would have taken up no more than a few feet of shelf space,” whereas now “[w]ith the emergence of literally hundreds of writers since and the reprinting of many authors from before 1968, the yield now is yards and

yards” (15). Owens, among many other Native authors with a variety of approaches, has developed new hybridized tools that, to a great extent, originate from Indigenous rhetoric(s) and worldviews and are also incorporated into the strategies of Western critical discourse (Pulitano 188). And yet, as expressed by Craig Womack, “[i]n all my years in Oklahoma I have yet to meet an Indian who introduced him or herself to me as a ‘hybrid’” (AILN 136). Even if these matters are complex, complexity as such is not a negative thing – rather, as Wub-e-ke-niew points out, “[f]rom the *Ahnishinahbæótjibway* perspective, there are mysteries but no paradoxes” (*We Have the Right to Exist* 203).

2.4 THREE GENERATIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AND *THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE* SERIES

In this part of the thesis, I discuss Erdrich’s role as a writer of Native American children’s and young adult literature and *The Birchbark House* series as teaching literature with the emphasis on nature/land and nature/land relationships. I will also analyze how *The Birchbark House* series fits into Third Generation children’s and young adult literature. First, however, as an example of a Western-based children’s literature encyclopedia, I shall take a look at Donna E. Norton’s extensive 640-page guide called *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children’s Literature* (2007, 7th edition) to see how Native American children’s literature has been depicted in this major handbook.

This pricey publication, which has been reprinted since 1983, is recommended for teachers, librarians and parents. Native Americans are mentioned in different places in the book, such as Native American folktales for young adults, stereotypes in Native American literature, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction and informational books. As a handbook, *Through the Eyes of a Child* covers a great variety of global themes and naturally, it cannot be totally comprehensive as far as Native literature goes. However, not many writers of Native origin are mentioned or emphasized – most stories or books listed as Native (-related) writings are in fact Native stories “retold” by non-Native writers and yet they are mentioned as Native literature, even if *Through the Eyes of a Child* does mention the issue of being aware of the unbalanced viewpoints in historical fiction (435) or reminds the readers how “[n]o educator or publisher today would condone the untrue and highly offensive descriptions of Native Americans presented in Carpenter’s *Geographical Reader, North America* published by Frank G. Carpenter in 1898” (503). One example of Western-based reasoning is Kathryn Lasky’s *Beyond the Divide*, which is described as a book based on “extensive research” of Theodora Kroeber’s biography of the last Yahi Indian, *Ishi, the Last of His Tribe*, and J. Goldsborough Bruff’s journal about the gold rush (423). Another example of how Western thinking and Western approach still dominates this edition of the handbook is how a Micmac story “Little Burnt Face” is categorized with some other European, Chinese and Vietnamese stories as a

typical Cinderella story (258) or how “Native American folktales may begin with some version of ‘When all was new, and the gods dwelt in the ancient places, long, long before the time of our ancestors’”(217). These points may not be as repugnant as Carpenter’s description of dangerous savage Indians (504), yet they do lack certain respect for Native people as natural owners and rightful interpreters of their culture and stories.

In chapter 10 an analysis of Louise Erdrich’s *The Birchbark House* is provided. In this “in-depth analysis,” it is said that Erdrich creates credibility for her story by identifying herself as a Turtle Mountain Ojibwa. It also states that “two of the evaluative criteria for Native American literature are that the Native American characters belong to a specific identified tribe and are not grouped together under one category referred to ‘Indian’ and that the customs, values, and beliefs for the specific tribe should be authentic and respected” (442). This analysis also mentions how Erdrich develops Ojibwa values in her novel by conveying, for example, the value of nature or the importance of dreams and voices heard in nature. The historical accuracy for settings and conflicts is secured by an accurate description of island seasons (442). As far as the evaluative criteria for Native American literature goes, in addition to the above-mentioned points, the notion of ownership needs to be considered – the natural ownership of all the Native (his/her)stories belongs to Native people and Native writers themselves, their stories are to be foregrounded and it is non-Native writers who need to meet the evaluative criteria of credible writing as far as Native cultures and Native literatures or their analysis go.

Many of the above-mentioned points in the 7th edition of *Through the Eyes of a Child* are well-meaning yet good intentions and questions posed on stereotypes or unbalanced histories are not properly addressed, and neither are they materialized in practical terms, such as foregrounding authentic Native materials. The above-mentioned interpretations easily become condescending, biased and simply culturally improper. “Through all these stories, children can experience Native American characters who have personal thoughts and emotions and who live within a family as well as within a tribe” (442). If this edition of *Through the Eyes of a Child* still mostly represents what is below mentioned as First Generation Native American Children’s literature (by not clearly identifying what works are made by Native and what by non-Native writers and by not emphasizing the authentic Native stories by Native writers or by not verifying the rightful ownership of Native stories or avoiding at times nearly racist rhetoric), Donna E. Norton’s more recent work *Multicultural Children’s Literature: Through the Eyes of Many Children*, 4th Edition (2013), focusing especially on cultural survival, is more sensitive in its approach. Here Norton (3) calls for a special sensitivity in terms of the quality and authenticity of the Native American literature and reference materials. She refers to earlier mentioned case of *The Education of Little Tree*, written by Forrest Carter, and how in 1991, it received that year’s American Booksellers Association’s ABBY award and was advertised as a sensitive, evocative autobiographical account of a Cherokee boyhood in the 1930s. After revelations about the author’s background and the fact that it was not an autobiography of a Cherokee boy, the book was moved from the New York Times Best Seller nonfiction list to historical fiction list. Norton emphasizes how such distinctions are important for scholars and students who are studying Native American literature.

In one of her earlier articles “Judging Authors by the Color of Their Skin? Quality Native American Children’s Literature,” Michelle Pagni Stewart adds yet another angle to this matter when analyzing Native American children’s literature. She claims, referring to Jon Stott, that since more than 80% of Native American children’s books have been written by well-intentioned yet at times culturally ignorant outsiders rather than Native American authors themselves, many stereotypes are perpetuated (182). Yet, this does not mean that all writings by non-Natives are automatically flawed. Stewart continues: “With Native American children’s literature, then, what we must consider when evaluating the texts is not solely who the author is. Certainly we should avoid books that continue to promote stereotypes or exhibit inaccuracies in the illustrations or story lines” (184-185) but, she adds: “[...] I do suggest that the debate is not so straightforward as mere ‘membership’ might suggest.” (192).

In analyzing the development of Native American children’s literature, Michelle Pagni Stewart (“Alive and Well” 46) refers to three generations of books (Table 1 below). According to Stewart (47), the First Generation represents books typically written by writers outside the Native culture, thus creating discourse that is affected by dominant stereotypes and misperceptions. Many of the writings mentioned in *Through the Eyes of a Child* belong to this category, as do most historical children’s adventure books on Indians, written by white writers, as earlier mentioned in this chapter. The Second Generation refers to such writings that wish to mediate and dismantle some of the cultural stereotypes present in the First Generation. Some of them might still have a limited view of Native cultures, although these books already present a major step forward in understanding Native experiences. Stewart analyses contemporary American Indian children’s novels, namely Joseph Bruchac’s *The Heart of a Chief* (1998) and Cynthia Leitich Smith’s *Rain Is Not My Indian Name* (2001), as examples of the Second and Third Generation novels, respectively, and in her opinion, “they have much to undo, necessitating not only a revising of the signifier but a reclaiming of it as well” (“Alive and Well” 47).

Stewart continues by explaining, how Third Generation is characterized by going beyond any essentialist points of view and deconstructing limited notions of Indian identity. At this point, the authors encourage the readers to participate in understanding and recognizing the richness of their cultures by applying American Indian literary traditions. Stewart further describes how Third Generation writing is simultaneously Native-centered and not Native-centered, and when trying to correct misunderstandings of the past, it must first undo the stereotypes and misperceptions and allow exploring of genres and stories of all kinds, shifting between contemporary and more universal ideas, as summarized in Table 1. (“Alive and Well and Reclaiming Their Cultural Voice: Third Generation Native American Children’s Literature” 52-61).

First Generation of American Indian children's novels:

- Books typically written by writers outside the Native culture
- Discourse that is affected by dominant stereotypes and misperceptions
- Most historical children's adventure books on Indians, written by white writers

Second Generation of American Indian children's novels:

- Such writings that wish to mediate and dismantle some of the cultural stereotypes present in the First Generation writings
- Some of them might still have a limited view of Native cultures, although these books already present a major step forward in understanding Native experiences

Third Generation of American Indian children's novels:

- Characterized by going beyond any essentialist points of view and deconstructing limited notions of Indian identity
- Authors encourage the readers to participate in understanding and recognizing the richness of their cultures by applying American Indian literary traditions
- Third Generation writing is simultaneously Native-centered and not Native-centered
- When trying to correct misunderstandings of the past, it must first undo the stereotypes and misperceptions and allow exploring of genres and stories of all kinds, shifting between contemporary and more universal ideas

Table 1. Michelle Pagni Stewart's model of the three generations of American Indian children's novels ("Alive and Well and Reclaiming Their Cultural Voice: Third Generation Native American Children's Literature" 45-61).

It can be said that *The Birchbark House* series presents the Third Generation children's and young adult literature by retelling the Ojibwe history from the Ojibwe point of view and from a female tribal member(s) point of view. Erdrich creates an image of a strong and kind individual Omakayas and represents her life story with her family in times of great change in Ojibwe history, while encouraging the readership to participate in understanding Ojibwe culture, worldview and storytelling tradition. These novels apply a non-linear Native story line, enhanced by traditional stories and Ojibwemowin and formed, especially in the beginning of her saga, in circles and cycles. Erdrich also creates the character of Omakayas in such a manner that even though she is specifically Ojibwe, she is also "just a girl" and in principle anyone can relate to her life and life experiences, even if not fully comprehending all the elements of Ojibwe culture. With Stewart's three generations model, in terms

of the final stage, the Third Generation, we also come closer to David Treuer's idea of deconstructing any simplified Indianness and reading the Native literature as literature, with the emphasis on "literature" rather than "Native," and focusing on the present moment of empowerment, not on the "vanishing Indian." *The Game of Silence* ends with such a positive note: "Here, after all, was not only danger but possibility. Here was adventure. Here was the next life they would live together on this earth." (248). According to Stewart, novels of both the Second and the Third Generation have the possibility to cast aside the myth of the vanishing Indian and remind the audience of the great variety of Indian identity and culture that these writers can reclaim. As the work done by Second Generation writers in establishing an American Indian identity from within, revealing the great variety of Native tribes, times, and experiences, the texts of the Third Generation need not be focused just on notions of Native American identity ("Alive and Well" 58). Instead, they can more freely revitalize and recreate their own dynamic cultural and tribal voice.

As mentioned earlier, I do wish to keep in mind that even if *The Birchbark House* series is categorized as young adult literature, it is literature for both young and old. The series offers a comprehensive source of cultural and historical information on Ojibwe life, stories and worldview, even if categorized as fiction and as a story of one family. As Elizabeth Gargano points out, "Erdrich pays her child readers the ultimate compliment: rather than adapting her cultural content to an easily accessible linear structure, she opens the door on a richly patterned, profoundly mysterious world – one that readers themselves must strive to experience," thus requiring active reading from her audience to be able to step into the Ojibwe landscape (41). This is especially so in *The Birchbark House* and *The Game of Silence*, where the story follows the seasonal cycle of Ojibwe life and allows the reader to travel with the family a full circle from the early summer birchbark house building to a spring maple sugar camp – the last chapter of *The Birchbark House* is called Full Circle.

For Seema Kurup in *Understanding Louise Erdrich* (71), *The Birchbark House* series, even if partially fictional, depicts traditional everyday Anishinaabe life before the full effect of colonization and it does it with a sense of place and immediacy. Such immediacy is appealing to Native readers as well: the importance of Native young adult literature for Native peoples themselves becomes clear when reading Debbie Reese's blog in American Indians in Children's Literature (AICL):

When my daughter was in third grade, her reading group started out with *Caddie Woodlawn* but abandoned it because of its problematic depictions of Native people. The book they read instead? *Birchbark House*. One of their favorite scenes from the book is when Omakayas has gone to visit Old Tallow to get a pair of scissors and has her encounter with a mama bear and her bear cubs. Indeed, they wrote a script and performed that chapter for their class (and of course, parents!). My daughter played the part of Omakayas. The prop she made for their performance is the scissors in their red beaded pouch. I've got them stored away for safekeeping. They represent my little girl speaking up about problematic depictions.³⁴

³⁴ Reese, Debbie. "A Few Words about Louise Erdrich's *Makoons*." *American Indians in Children's Literature*. (americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.fi/search/label/Louise%20Erdrich).

Native stories are not separate from their (story) landscape. Tony Watkins writes in his contribution “Homelands” to *Children’s Literature. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*: “So the stories we tell our children, the narratives we give them to make sense of cultural experience constitute a kind of mapping, maps of meaning that enable our children to make sense of the world. These maps contribute to children’s sense of identity [...]. Some narratives, we might say, shape the way children find a ‘home’ in the world.” (59). In an article from *The New York Times*’s print archive, Erdrich describes her own sense of developing character and place:

In a tribal view of the world, where one place has been inhabited for generations, the landscape becomes enlivened by a sense of group and family history. Unlike most contemporary writers, a traditional storyteller fixes listeners in an unchanging landscape combined of myth and reality. People and place are inseparable. (“Where I Ought to Be” 1)

As a contemporary Native storyteller, Erdrich takes that unchanging landscape of myth and reality and weaves it into a revised tradition with some new colors and new storylines, complementing and adding new elements for the shared story. And yet, even that landscape is combined of myth and reality. She weaves with bright new colors by giving voice to a child, a girl called Omakayas, and her grandmother, Nokomis, and in this way she adds new angles to a more white male-dominated tradition of Native history writing. Another such element is the new forms of media that the modern Native American storytellers increasingly use. Also, Hafen (25) mentions the importance of the growth of electronic media to American Indian children’s literature: Debbie Reese (Nambe) writes and administers a website for American Indians in Children’s Literature,³⁵ and oyate.org, which is managed by Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale (Santee/Cree), maintains current discussions and critical assessments. This website complements their publication *The Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children*. Similarly, Erdrich’s Birchbark Books and Native Arts with its website and other social media sites promotes Native cultures and Native literature for both older and younger audiences and gives chances for new voices to be heard.

In *Louise Erdrich*, David Stirrup discusses Erdrich’s role in Native American children’s literature, addressing her first three books of *The Birchbark House* series, and places her among such writers as Abenaki writer Joe Bruchac, Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan, and Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday, who are best known for adult fiction (181). According to Stirrup, many Native writers have tried to address two intertwined issues in their writing, firstly “a general appetite for children’s writing that engages with the lives and histories of Native peoples; but [secondly] such writing comes with an ethical imperative to deal in far more nuanced fashion with the realities of those lives and histories” (181).

³⁵ Reese, Debbie. *American Indians in Children’s Literature*. (americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/).

When analyzing Erdrich's writings, Stirrup argues that there is a clear educational but also entertaining intent and an act of cultural recovery/respect in these novels as well as the author's own journey back to a sense of emplacement (182). Stirrup adds, referring to Kimberly Blaesser's notion, how "[i]n returning, she is also, in essence, returning the stories, or perhaps they, themselves, are 'migrating home'" (182). Individual stories in these novels have a vital function in educating Omakayas about Ojibwe customs, beliefs, and history (Stirrup 183). "As elders are instructing their youngsters, so we as readers are being instructed in the history of mid-nineteenth-century Ojibwe, still semi-nomadic but clearly touched by white society." (Stirrup 183). Even though Erdrich mentions that the material for her novels is derived from conversations with elders on Madeline Island and her own textual research, her narrative focuses more on the inner life of Omakayas, her maturing process and her experiences and discoveries (Stirrup 184, 185). Similarly, this is the focus of this thesis as well as far as deep ecology and nature/land relationships are concerned. According to Stirrup, it is necessary that to fully appreciate Erdrich's work and engage in a more nuanced reading, one needs to have knowledge about the Ojibwe heritage. However, one also needs to be aware of the tense balance of equating fiction with life and culture and treating narrative as a manifestation of cultural knowledge (192). That said, it is impossible to ignore the importance of "generating and renewing narratives of Native survival and continuation on the woodlands, lakes, and plains of Ojibwe Country" (Stirrup 193).

Nora Murphy also discusses the story of Omakayas as teaching literature – Erdrich educates her readers with the story itself, with Ojibwe words and authentic illustrations of Ojibwe life which at times is very humorous:

In addition to teaching about the life of Omakayas and her family in Minnesota in the 1840s, *The Birchbark House* offers young readers two other avenues into the history and culture of the Ojibwe. The book incorporates many Ojibwe words, said Erdrich, because "the characters . . . did not speak English and I really wanted the reader to know something about the way they sounded." Erdrich also drew the book's illustrations because she didn't want inaccuracies and wanted to "convey the humor of Ojibwe life and draw the very things in my house that are authentic to Ojibwe life, like makakoon and makazinan." (288)³⁶

An essential element of both teaching and entertaining the readers of *The Birchbark House* series is the role of nature or land. Nature has of course been an important feature of children's literature for a long time. As Li-ping Chang points out, "environmentalism has had a place in children's literature for some time, appearing first as a love of nature" ("Spirits in the Material World" 149). She refers, for example, to such Western writers as Kenneth Grahame and his classic *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series (1930–1947) that depicts harmonious relationships between children and nature, and the Mary Poppins books by P. L. Travers (1934–

³⁶ Murphy, Nora. "Starting Children on the Path to the Past: American Indians in Children's Historical Fiction." *Minnesota History*, 57.6 (Summer 2001): 284-295. (collections.mnhs.org/MNHistoryMagazine/articles/57/v57i06p284-295.pdf).

1988) (149). Chang mentions also other children's books that have addressed the issues of ecological crises and given voice to those who do not have one, such as Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (1971), Gerald Aschenbrenner's *Jack, the Seal and the Sea* (1988), and Lynne Cherry's *The Great Kapok Tree* (1991) ("Spirits in the Material World" 149).

Li-ping Chang further states how Native American animism sees everything as having a spirit; whether we talk about animals, humans or plants, all beings have power of their own to be respected and all humans have also their guardian animals ("Spirits in the Material World" 152). For example in Erdrich's writings, Chickadee gets his name from his guardian bird, something that is not appreciated by the Mother Superior, who thinks this wild, savage boy should have been named after a human, preferably a proper saint. For Chickadee, however, this woman of rules and regulations needs to be escaped from, and his solace is found in nature, where he can breathe more easily (C 88-96). As analyzed in chapter four, nature/land is the realm of solace in multiple ways for Erdrich's characters by providing guardians, teachings, nourishment, shelter, healing, stories and all forms of survival. Nature/land with all its beings, trees, animals, forefathers and guardians are equal partners in dialogue, or in Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, with Omakayas and her family. At night, Omakayas dreams special healing and even life-saving dreams and during the day, her family's everyday life consists of moments of traditional storytelling – the sacred and the daily intertwines.

However, in terms of the role of nature/land, the notion of separation, man being superior and above the rest of nature/land, has remained strong in Western thinking. Chang describes, how "[i]n our time, ecocentrism arose as the antidote to this illness, to the environmental destruction that an anthropocentric view of the world has caused. In anthropocentric cultures, people tend to regard the world and its creatures as intrinsically different from – and inferior to – humankind, and therefore as objects to use, and use up, as humans see fit." (155). In such a worldview, the notions of cycles and circles and interconnectedness have hardly any place. Elizabeth Gargano states how, by employing a cyclical narrative structure, Erdrich's young adult literature "reflects an Ojibwa worldview that affirms gratitude to nature for its gifts, the preciousness of communal knowledge and traditions, and the integration of daily activities with sacred experience" (31). By doing so, Erdrich challenges Euro-American ideas of humanity's supremacy and the separation of the sacred and the secular realm (Gargano 31). *The Birchbark House* series is not about the "vanishing Indian," or the vanishing Ojibwe, but about surviving Ojibwe and adapting Ojibwe who find their strength together in hard times of radical change and whose story, now in a more realistic and versatile format, Erdrich wants to share with her audiences, both young and old.

To summarize this chapter, one may argue that there is presently a great variety of views and approaches within Native American (children's and young adult) literature and literary studies as well as theory development. This is naturally a positive thing, indicating an active and vital (academic) field with great growth and innovation potential, and hopefully the varied views bring positive and constructive developments within the field. Native narratives of today keep changing, shifting, playing, negotiating, as each and every scholar and storyteller adds his or her view to the multivocal story. It is obvious that we have globally entered an era where all groups of people, different minorities

included, want and are entitled to express their own nature and their own agendas in their own terms. Also, Native literature is to be analyzed by its own criteria rather than just being a reaction to so called white canonic literature. Native writers and theoreticians have a right to choose what Native and non-Native materials, approaches and theories to foreground and what to neglect. It is also up to them, whether they want their creations to be addressed as artistic, political, sociological, spiritual or everyday tribal/cultural reality. In addition, they can freely choose their audiences. What is true and valuable to them is what matters. This is liberating and allows me as an outsider to redefine my position as not-knowing and as the one whose turn is to listen and learn about these stories that are “migrating home,” to use Stirrup’s expression (182).

3. ECOCRITICAL APPROACHES AND DEEP ECOLOGY: OJIBWE CULTURE AND NATIVE (OJIBWE) ECOLOGUE IN LOUISE ERDRICH’S *BIRCHBARK HOUSE* SERIES

The entire Indian Civilization was built from the study of nature.

Philip Deere in Hartmut Lutz’s
“The Circle as a Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction”
(195)

After covering some of the key points of Native American children’s and young adult literature and literary studies, I now focus on exploring in greater detail ecocriticism, especially the notions of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, and their possible relevance when analyzing Native (Ojibwe) literature.³⁷

This chapter is naturally not all-encompassing – as an interdisciplinary field, ecocriticism is linked with a great many theories and points of departure from political and radical to environmental and sociological. In this section I refer to thoughts by different writers, Native scholars and ecocritics, such as Donald L. Fixico, Hartmut Lutz and David Bohm as well as David Kronlid, John A. Grim, Arne Naess, George Sessions, Alan Jacobs, Clare Bradford, Michael D. McNally, Catherine Rainwater, Joni Adamson, Donelle N. Dreese, Vine Deloria Jr., Davis Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb, among others. I wish to elaborate how some aspects of ecocriticism, especially those related to

³⁷ As a non-Native and non-Ojibwe, I am aware that my point of view in these matters is always that of an outsider and my analysis and presentation are inevitably affected by and mediated through my own cultural background.

deep ecology, might resonate in the context of Native and Ojibwe writing and especially Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series and how ecocriticism may promote and further support the creation of the concept of Native Ecologue and Native (Tribal) Ecologue. My special interests lie in Fixico's and Lutz's notions of circles and cycles as well as Bohm's understanding of dialogue, all pointing to Native Ecologue. These notions that link with deep ecology can be applied to the Native context when analyzing Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series. My detailed analysis of *The Birchbark House* novels and applied deep ecology, in the form of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, are presented in chapter four and concluded in chapters five and six.

First, however, I wish to present two important aspects of nature – namely values of nature and views of nature – that help us to position Native writing in the field of ecocriticism. According to David Kronlid in *Ecofeminism and Environmental Ethics*, when we talk about values of nature, there are six different aspects that can be taken into consideration (41, emphasis original):

1. <i>Utility value</i> , referring to things that are good because they are useful for some purpose
2. <i>Extrinsic (instrumental value)</i> , referring to things that are good because they are means to attain something that is good
3. <i>Inherent value</i> , referring to things that are good because the experience of contemplating them is good or rewarding in itself
4. <i>Intrinsic value</i> , referring to things that are good in themselves or good because of their own intrinsic properties
5. <i>Contributory value</i> , referring to things that are good because they contribute to the intrinsically good life or are parts of the intrinsically good life
6. <i>Intrinsic worth</i> , referring to entities that have a dignity of their own

Table 2. David Kronlid's categorization of values of nature (41).

When relating these values to Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, one may claim that all these categories as aspects of nature or as part of land relationships are visible. Within the frame of Ojibwe culture, these aspects are characterized by respect, humbleness, reciprocity and understanding of interdependence. The land is valuable for example because it provides food for the buffalo (utility value), sugar camping is meaningful because it means in winter Omakayas and her family can enjoy the sweetness of hard candy (instrumental value), meditating on her home island makes Omakayas happy (inherent value), blueberries are good and as such Omakayas's favorites (intrinsic value), bears are respected and valuable for the Ojibwe as providers of powerful medicine (contributory value), and for the traditional Ojibwe, all

beings, even the smallest chickadees, have a value and dignity of their own (intrinsic worth) and so on.

Based on Kronlid's value statements, there are two major environmental ethics categories, anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. According to Kronlid, anthropocentrism holds that nature does not have intrinsic value or worth as such, whereas all variants of nonanthropocentrism see nature as having intrinsic value or worth (41). Native writing, such as Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, belongs under nonanthropocentric literature, where nature has intrinsic value and worth and where humans are not the center of the universe. Hence, even the notion of dialogue, in the Native context, can be further renamed as Native Ecologue, or in this case Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, where nature, humans and non-humans across time and space are interconnected and equal participants in dialogue. Similar thoughts are expressed by John A. Grim, who writes in his chapter on "Indigenous Traditions and Deep Ecology," how deep ecology steps beyond Cartesian dualism and no longer sees the human in the subject position and the natural world as objects known by the human. The individual self, with a lower case "s," is set within the capital "S," the larger Self of relatedness to all beings. Such thinking is also prevalent in deep ecology when searching for the cosmological perspective of relatedness to the larger whole (39-40). Grim explains how in Native languages, such as Algonkian languages, the notion of "person" extends into the natural world, and individuals are respected based on their experience of nature, such as lakes, stones or winds. Visions and mythic narratives have close connections with kinship, sacred sites and ceremonials (39). In Erdrich's stories, tribal elders, such as grandmother Nokomis or trickster Nanapush, are respected due to their deep knowledge of the healing power of nature and their abilities to tell soothing, rejuvenating and empowering stories of shared survival.

This is opposite to common Western thinking, characterized by dualism, as Clare Bradford discusses in *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature*. In Western culture, space is seen as empty when uninhabited and land is something that can be bought or sold; space goes from waste or wild to settled and time and space are distinct and separate concepts (13). Ken Lokensgard emphasizes how Native environments were inhabited by many beings other than humans and how Native tribes had meaningful, reciprocal relationships with these other beings through religious rituals. When the tribes were moved from their lands in the early 19th century, they were removed from these other beings who taught them about land and survival. Native lands were "not simply an area empty of European Americans in which they could hide. Rather, it was an area rich with life, knowledge, and history." (Lokensgard 70).

In quite a different manner, in *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* the landscape historian John Brinkerhoff Jackson describes the Great Plains as follows: "It is magnificent, undulating country, and before white settlers arrived it was where hundreds of thousands of buffalo grazed on the expanse of short grass." (153-154). He continues: "It is easy to suppose that when the first settlers confronted the monotonous sea of waving grass, they must have longed to divide it into squares and rectangles in order to give it something like a human scale." (154). No mention is made to any of the peoples who lived in the Great Plains, called them home, storied their landscapes, and who were

unlikely to see them as monotonous. Jackson, instead, moves straight from buffalos to first settlers. The understanding of space can also differ in another way when we talk about deep ecology – the Western notion of “pristine wilderness” does not always resonate with a Native view that sees secular spiritualizing as something foreign. John A. Grim writes:

Quite often an indigenous peoples’ religious focus on a particular geographical site is seen by deep ecologists as an affirmation of “wilderness.” That is, a natural site whose aesthetic, mythic, historic, or religious importance calls for special community protection and conservation. What is strikingly different between the two positions, however, is the understanding of how humans interact with that site. Typically, the indigenous sociopolitical commitment to homelands and sacred sites is characterized by a sense of space that has strong individual and communal biographical dimensions, a sense of ancestors placed in the land, and a traditional recognition of spiritual presences in selected sites. Thus, a site may be numinous and, as such, avoided, but the absence of humans does not confer spiritual value. (45)

Ancestral lands are also mentioned by Sean Teuton, who claims that despite their differences, oral narratives express a wish to live closely with the unique ancestral land and its creatures, a wish to be committed to this land and its broad community and have faith in the renewal stories (20).

In addition to the above-mentioned notion of the values of nature, David Kronlid shows how nature can be viewed within ecocriticism, and in this case especially ecofeminism (Table 3 below). In *Ecofeminism and Environmental Ethics*, Kronlid lists four ways to relate with nature. First, nature can be seen as subject and also, we can see nature as informant. Nature can also be our partner, and in the fourth category nature is seen as ecological communities (61). In a subject position, all beings affect each other, whether animals, trees, plants, oceans or even the earth as a whole. When we see nature as informant, as our conversational partner, we see nature as something that inspires our knowledge and our values of nature. As a partner, nature is equal with humans, with a partnership ethic, and when we talk about ecological communities, we refer to ecosystems, populations and bioregions. (Kronlid 61-69). How these above-mentioned notions may be applicable in Native cultural context and also relate to Erdrich’s writing and the notion of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, is further discussed in more detail in chapter four and concluded in chapters five and six.

Nature as subject	All beings are in a subject position and affect each other, whether animals, trees, plants, oceans or even the earth as whole.
Nature as informant	Nature as our conversational partner, as something that inspires our knowledge and our values of nature.

Nature as partner	Nature as equal with humans, with a partnership ethic.
Nature as ecological communities	Nature as ecosystems, populations and bioregions

Table 3. David Kronlid's categorization of ways to relate with nature (61).

Donelle N. Dreese writes in *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures*, how in order to know who we really are we need to first know where we are – these two points are intimately linked. Environmental factors affect us physically, emotionally and spiritually, and we all develop our own sense of place and love to that place that feels “right” or “home,” a place we long for (1). Home is also a psychological place where we belong, where we may feel free, fearless, loved and accepted.

The theme of home and homelands is visible throughout Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, where Omakayas learns to love the different landscapes her family encounters on their travels, yet the Island of the Golden-breasted Woodpecker is for her the dearest of all, her childhood home. Similarly, Erdrich writes: “I grew up on the Great Plains. I'm a dry-land-for-hundreds-of-miles person, but I've gotten mixed up with people who live on lakes. And then these islands have begun to haunt me, especially the one with all of the books.” (*BaI* 4). As Dreese states, “[p]erhaps there is no place more influential in the development of the human identity than the place where one grows up” (2). That place is a multisensory place, rich with sights, sounds, aromas, touch, feelings, memories, tears and laughter, all that connects me to myself and to all the others, past and present. Our home is a holistic experience – it embodies our culture, history, community, stories, values, memories and relationships. For the Native landscapes, as in *The Birchbark House* series, the presence of forefathers, non-human entities, and all the forms of nature is an essential and inseparable part of life story and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, as further elaborated in chapters four and five.

3.1 ON THE CONCEPTS OF ECOCRITICISM, DEEP ECOLOGY, NATIVE (OJIBWE) ECOLOGUE, GLOCALITY AND LANDSCAPE

In this part of the thesis, I analyze in greater detail the development of ecocriticism and deep ecology and take a look at the related notions of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, glocality and landscape. In the following sections, I then elaborate David Bohm's views on dialogue and Donald L Fixico's and Hartmut Lutz's understanding of Native circles and cycles to see how these elements can be integrated in the concept of Native Ecologue and how they can, in the

cultural context of the Ojibwe, be also applied in connection with Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.

3.1.1 ECOCRITICISM: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FIELD AND NATIVE CONTEXT

Donelle N. Dreese states how respect for nature and an awareness of interconnectedness are probably the most basic notions in the rapidly growing literary theory called ecocriticism. She refers to William Ruekert, who first coined the term in 1978. Ecocriticism addresses the issues of landscape and the environment, how the landscape is presented in literature, how the concept of nature has evolved through time and how the environmental crises have affected the literature and also how we all are interconnected (4). Dreese also refers to Cheryl Glotfelty's analysis of how ecocritical studies include also such themes as the frontier, Indians, animals, rivers, cities, mountains, deserts, garbage and the body (4). In this way, ecocriticism covers many different topics and tries to reduce the dualistic thinking of us versus nature. Over the years, ecocriticism has evolved, comprising now more systematically different approaches and emphases and several related disciplines. Li-ping Chang mentions in "Spirits in the Material World: Ecocentrism in Native American Culture and Louise Erdrich's *Chickadee*" how ecocriticism has expanded in three progressive stages or waves, referring to Lawrence Buell's notions that include the first-wave theory that noted the effect of traditional nature writing on environmentalism and the importance of ethics, the second wave redefined ecology in terms of environmental justice, and in the third wave Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic suggested that all human experiences should be studied from an environmental viewpoint (150). For Native literature, all these three stages have relevance – for example, Leslie Marmon Silko and Paula Gunn Allen have been environmental advocates in their writings, Winona LaDuke is known for her active role in nature preservation and work for tribal lands and, as an example, in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series nature relationships form the center of her stories and therefore the focus point of this study as well.

As an interdisciplinary field, ecocriticism has become an umbrella term. Catherine Rainwater explains in "Haunted by Birds" (155-156), referring to Ursula K. Heise, how ecocriticism was defined in the late 1990s as an interdisciplinary field of research focusing on the role of the natural environment, representations of nature and natural and related values as well as literary and artistic constructions of nature and environment. Later years have also brought under this umbrella term different voices related to ethnicity, gender and species that attempt to deconstruct ethnocentric, patriarchal and anthropocentric hegemony with different genres, authors, cultural theories, and methodologies, Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, cognitive science and deep ecology included. Therefore, these days ecocriticism as a concept is a more challenging one to define, embracing as it does a broad range of topics.

Much of today's ecocritical writings related, for example, to Native American reservations or tribal homelands emphasize different

environmental justice, ecological crisis and human rights issues that are relevant topics in daily media and for example in such publications as *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*. Ecosocialism and environmentalism as well as human rights theories all have their say in such nature-related discussions. However, in her *Birchbark House* series, Louise Erdrich writes about the past, the Ojibwe in the 19th century, a time when the heated discussions on pollution or human rights violations by big companies were not yet issues of current interest. She writes fiction about a time when the tribal lands are gradually getting lost and there are new landscapes and also struggles with a new life style waiting for the Ojibwe – but there are still no real big urban environments or reservations for Omakayas and her family to live in; rather, they are still semi-nomads living in close, personal relations with nature, non-human environment included, and relatively free to wander. In this thesis, even if the ecological change is already taking place, my key interest lies in understanding personal nature/land relationships, as described in detail in chapter four, where I study nature/land, with its changing landscapes, as a teacher, as a healing force, and as a source of survival, challenge and happiness for Omakayas and her family.

Yet, it is also important to remember the historical realities that form the reference points in Erdrich's stories, even though *The Birchbark House* series is of course fictional. Historically, the 19th century was a very radical phase for the Ojibwe. Rebecca Kugel (2) writes in *To Be the Main Leaders of Our People: A History of Minnesota Ojibwe Politics, 1825-1898* in detail how it is essential yet a profound challenge to place the Ojibwe at the center of their own history. It is the Ojibwe's own viewpoint that must be foremost when interpreting their past, and without a deep understanding of Ojibwe cultural realities and cultural matrix, we cannot make sense of Ojibwe history. The year 1825 marked the beginning of a formal alliance with the Americans (Kugel 3) and the first missionaries arrived in 1832, the first land cession treaty took place in 1837 and came to a head by the 1850s (Kugel 5). In the intervening decades the Ojibwe had signed several more treaties with the Americans, each time surrendering millions of acres of their ancestral lands, while more and more Euro-Americans moved into Minnesota. Their lumbering, mining, and farming activities seriously disturbed the traditional Ojibwe ecosystems, and the fur trade lost its economic primacy. In less than two decades the Ojibwe plunged into poverty, and many social issues, such as alcohol abuse, greatly increased. (Kugel 5). Awareness of such development is also present in *The Birchbark House* series. In her analysis, Kugel (10) also explains how alliances were central to all Ojibwe relationships. Such alliances were formed, for example, between humans and spiritual helpers or groups became allied through marriage. Alliances were created through a series of highly symbolic rituals, such as an exchange of gifts. In *The Birchbark House* novels, this can be seen, for example, in adoption practices. In *The Porcupine Year*, Animikiins, Little Thunder, is adopted as a son of the chief who has lost his own son at the hands of the Ojibwe. This is later discussed in chapter four. Kugel describes alliances and gift exchanges in the following manner:

The ritual language employed by the Ojibwe and the other Native peoples of the Great Lakes to describe the new relationship between allies was full of intimate familial imagery. Allies ate from the same dish, smoked from

the same pipe. Allies exchanged clothing, weapons, and tools with one another. Allies were assumed to share political and social objectives. The Ojibwe understood alliances as organic processes, and invested much effort and time into maintaining the cycle of events – the visits, gift exchanges and expressions of mutuality and good will – that kept an alliance alive. (10)

In *The Game of Silence*, when the raggedy ones wade ashore from their boats, there is no need to urge kindness:

Blankets were soon draping bare shoulders, and the pitiful naked children were covered, too, with all the extra clothing that the people could think of. Food was thrust into the hungry people's hands – strips of dried fish and bannock bread, maple sugar and fresh boiled meat. (3)

Similar to this historical study by Kugel, Catherine Rainwater describes in "Haunted by Birds" (153-155), in relation to Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves*, how the Eurocentric propensity to anthropocentrism and atomization, without an understanding of the holistic worldview, has created artificial material, spiritual and ideational boundaries that writers like Erdrich challenge in their writing. Rainwater further notes how even ecocriticism and environmentalism as well as ecocritical theory have been a decidedly Western, post-Enlightenment frame of reference, whereas indigenous people share an alternative view, the pan-tribal cosmological principle of "relationship," and an understanding of human interdependence with the rest of the natural world, often depicted in story rather than theory form. Rainwater ("Haunted by Birds" 154-158) continues how despite such nature-centered worldviews, till now the Native people have, to a great extent, been excluded from any serious ecocritical conversations. They have instead been pushed into an object position in Western and "wilderness" fiction and non-fiction for not sharing the Western views on nature writing or not fitting into the Western paradigm of ecocritical thinking with Western conceptual constraints, where the self is seen to be in competition with and in opposition to nature. Based on Rainwater's analysis, it can be said that the Western and Native notions of identity, self, and personhood and the whole cosmo-visions differ greatly, causing many challenges yet also opportunities when analyzing, for example, Native literature and refiguring the human.

Native Ecologue and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue (Figures 4 and 5 in chapters three and four) resonate well with Rainwater's claims. As a holistic concept of Native literary analysis, Native Ecologue is based on relationships between all forms of life and understanding of human interdependence with the rest of nature/land. In Native Ecologue, the human is not the only subject but shares that position with all other forms of life, beyond time and space, and all forms of life are equal participants in this mode of dialogue. Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, which is the basis for literary analysis of especially Ojibwe narratives studied in this thesis, wishes to emphasize that in order for any of us to survive, we should move from ego- to eco-centricity, and competition and power-seeking attitudes must be replaced with more holistic compassion and empathy, following the ancient Ojibwe teachings. Similarly, Michael D. McNally's thoughts relate well to this concept, when he emphasizes "[...] the significance of Ojibwe convictions that moral relations extend beyond the

human not only to nonhuman persons in what the West would call nature – plants and animals and weather phenomena – but also to nonhuman persons in the realm of the spirits” (*Honoring Elders* 48).

The notion of power inequities is also pointed out by Joni Adamson in *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* where she discusses environmental degradation and environmental racism with human rights abuses that affect the Native communities and the need to work together to find the middle ground that takes into consideration both the differences and the similarities between Native and non-Native contested terrains and the blind spots traditionally overlooked, combining here theory with personal experience. According to Adamson, writers like Erdrich use fiction and “land-based language” (Joy Harjo’s term) to make the tools of cultural critique available to a wider audience inside and outside the academy and to engage in transformative local pedagogy (xix-xx, 120). In her *Birchbark House* series, with its land-based language and local pedagogy, Erdrich includes many such everyday Ojibwemowin expressions and personal drawings that reflect the Ojibwe worldview and Ojibwe life. These are further discussed in chapters four and five.

Adamson refers in *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* to such early ecocritically oriented theoreticians as Cheryll Glotfelty, who sees in eco-critical writings the world usually referring to the society and the social sphere rather than the natural world and ecocriticism being a strongly white movement that has not paid enough attention to the connection between the environment and social justice issues (78). Adamson also mentions Glenn Love, who argues that the natural world is modified to meet the needs of retreating sophisticated pastoral-yearning humans who then, after an enlivening nature experience, tend to return back to the more desirable urban landscape. Love celebrates such literature where there is an implicit or stated regard for the non-human realm as well (79). Native narratives, such as Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series, include the non-human realm with such beings as the spirits of the ancestors, thunderbirds or protective spirit animals as part of land- or nature-based dialogue.

In Erdrich’s novels, there is, however, no such entry and exit policy as mentioned above – rather in her *Birchbark House* series her characters do not experience a “pastoral moment” but are in their daily life inseparable from nature/land and its rhythms, nature is their home, their lives are shaped by the land and take place in co-operation with the non-human and natural world that is, however, not static but keeps changing both by natural and by white man related causes. Erdrich does not write just about nature/land or about a visit to pristine wilderness, rather her characters are in constant dialogue with nature/land in her storytelling, together with the non-human realm. They are inseparable from islands and lakes and finally they become one with the grass lands of the plains, like Nokomis, who greets the sun the very last time: “They buried her simply. There was no stone, no grave house, nothing to mark where she lay except the exuberant and drying growth of her garden.” (*Makoons* 127). For Nokomis, there is no need of an Ojibwe grave house: “I do not need a marker of my passage, for my creator knows where I am.” (*Makoons* 127). It was her garden that she loved the most. “I lived a good life, my hair turned to snow. I saw my great-grandchildren. I grew my garden. That is all.” (*Makoons* 127). Such oneness with land, lakes and islands that nourish the Ojibwe is also

described in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, where Erdrich sees Tobasonakwut, her baby's father, as the lake, vast, contradictory and full of secrets (32). "For if to describe one is also to describe the other, I am set free." (*BaI* 32). Erdrich further describes how people by the lake were literally composed of the lake cell by cell – they lived off fish, animals, the lake's water and medicine that grew at its shores (*BaI* 34).

3.1.2 DEEP ECOLOGY: FROM EGO TO ECO

Out of the above-mentioned different orientations within ecocriticism, I especially focus in this thesis on deep ecology. David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb (5) emphasize in *Deep Ecology and World Religions* the difficulty of defining deep ecology, it being a multivalent term and in dispute. Deep ecology may refer to deep questioning of ethical and causal issues of environmental problems, or it may be related to basic values shared by environmental activists, or it may refer to ecosophies, different philosophies of nature. When analyzing Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, I emphasize those features of deep ecology that cover more "spiritual" and relationship- and interdependence-related aspects of ecological thinking, befitting Erdrich's representation of 19th century Native and Ojibwe life in *The Birchbark House* series. Hence, my main focus is on nature/land relationships and the roles nature/land has in Omakayas's life and in the life of her family.

When trying to map out the development of the notion and the movement of deep ecology, one may start with Drengson, Devall and Schroll's article "The Deep Ecology Movement: Origins, Development, and Future Prospects (Toward a Transpersonal Ecosophy)," which describes the more diffuse origins of the environmental movement and how it was deepened and strengthened by the 60s social justice and peace movements, led by Martin Luther King Jr. The deep ecology movement was said to have originated with Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962), where she clearly showed how our wellbeing as humans was dependent on the condition of whole biotic communities and how living beings are interrelated within ecosystems (102). Then again, one might argue that such understanding is by no means new or a specifically Euromerican invention; rather, different Native cultures globally have shared many similar patterns of thinking since eons. Drengson, Devall and Schroll emphasize re-thinking when trying to establish a right relationship with nature/land. With the right relationship, they suggest that:

There is a need for a psychic reorientation with the personal and collective unconscious that, according to Metzner (1992), will require "re-thinking the relationship of humankind with the animal kingdom, the plant kingdom and the elemental realms of air, water and earth/land (p. 1)". Drengson (2010) referred to right relationship or "right actions with integrity and honesty, honoring others" (p. 244) as an essential value in the Wild Way. (106)

The article further explains, how such terms as intrinsic value, inherent worth, biocentric equality, egalitarianism, ecocentrism, and non-anthropocentrism

have been widely used in the literature for the purpose of distinguishing deep ecology movement principles from such forms of narrow anthropocentrism or humanism that put humans above all other lifeforms (107). Mark Schroll, one of the writers, calls for transpersonal ecosophy “which includes ecocriticism, ecopsychology, the deep ecology movement, the anthropology of consciousness, humanistic and transpersonal psychology” and “promotes experiential transformation: awakening our awareness of empathy of universal suffering that internalizes a felt self sense of ethics. This code of ethics is also guided by an intellectual understanding of humankind’s role in cosmic evolution. (Schroll, 2009/2010, p. 6).” (113). When studying the further developments of deep ecology, one may refer to a deep ecology platform, originally formulated by Arne Naess and George Sessions in 1984 (Drengson, Devall and Schroll mention the year 1972 as the start year of the deep ecology movement by Naess, 101), and this platform consists of the eight interrelated principles, as listed by Andrew McLaughlin (27-28):

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating <i>life quality</i> (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

Table 4. Deep ecology platform by Arne Naess and George Sessions (McLaughlin 27-28, emphasis original).

These platforms or principles, similar to a certain extent to the list provided by Barnhill and Gottlieb below in Table 5, yet more political, can be categorized as “leftist,” calling for a radical social change, as Andrew McLaughlin sees it in his article (25-30). Alternatively, the concept of deep ecology can emphasize the humanity’s relations with the rest of creation, the interdependence of all life forms, thus rejecting the worldview that emphasizes only anthropocentrism. In such thinking, there is also place for a selfhood beyond

ego and a more spiritual framework or network.³⁸ Such concepts of deep ecology run parallel with the notion of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, a dialogue that includes all life forms, as described by Nanapush with the word *Nindinawemaganidok*, or all my relatives, on the first page of Erdrich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* or as described in such concepts as "the Sacred Hoop"³⁹ or "the Medicine Wheel,"⁴⁰ the all-encompassing circle of universal life.

Davis Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb have also written about the past and present-day deep ecology in *Deep Ecology and World Religions* (2001), how "[i]n recent years the ethical and religious attitude of valuing nature for its own sake and seeing it as divine or spiritually vital has been called 'deep ecology'" (1). Also, deep ecology was born as a reaction to what we humans have done to the earth, replacing nature with "environment" (Barnhill and Gottlieb 1). The earlier mentioned concept of "Anthropocene" is related to deep ecology. In his article, Robert Schimelpfenig claims that "because human activity now plays a major role in determining the condition of the Earth's environment, there is a growing view that we should name the current geological epoch the "Anthropocene," meaning the age of human effects" (826). Deep ecology tries to fight against the Anthropocene, which Robert Schimelpfenig further describes as "a period in which humans are degrading natural systems. This damage occurs in part because we have not come to terms with the dual character of human nature – being both inside and outside nature." (821). Schimelpfenig also describes how in order to survive, humans "need to learn to balance two competing ontologies: one holistic and cyclical, the other productive and oriented toward linear time" (822). Such a view clearly indicates that we have all the reason to study different Native epistemologies and ontologies that are by nature more holistic and oriented to cyclical understanding of life and nature.

Holism is also emphasized by Barnhill and Gottlieb who have created the following list of the most common features of deep ecology (6):

an emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature (biocentrism or ecocentrism)
a focus on wholes, e.g., ecosystems, species, or the earth itself, rather than simply individual organisms (holism)
an affirmation that humans are not separate from nature (there is no "ontological gap" between humans and the natural world)
an emphasis on interrelationships
an intuitive and sensuous communion with the earth
an identification of the self with the natural world
a spiritual orientation that sees nature as sacred

³⁸ See e.g. Roger Gottlieb (www.ecospeakers.com/speakers/gottlieb.html).

³⁹ See e.g. Paula Gunn Allen: *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986).

⁴⁰ See e.g. Hunter, D. & Sawyer, C. "Blending Native American spirituality with individual psychology in work with children." *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 62, (2006): 234–250. ([pzacad.pitzer.edu/~hfairchi/pdf/psychology/Hunter\(2006\)NativeAmerSpirituality.pdf](http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/~hfairchi/pdf/psychology/Hunter(2006)NativeAmerSpirituality.pdf)) or Brokenleg, M. "Unshackled by Visions and Values." *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 5:3 (1996): 136–139. (martinbrokenleg.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/05_3_Brokenleg.pdf).

a tendency to look to other cultures (especially Asian and indigenous) as sources of insight
a humility toward nature, in regards to our place in the natural world, our knowledge of it, and our ability to manipulate nature in a responsible way (“nature knows best”)
a stance of “letting nature be,” and a celebration of wilderness and hunter-gatherer societies
a tendency to value all things in nature equally (biocentric egalitarianism)

Table 5. The most common features of deep ecology by Barnhill and Gottlieb (6).

In chapters four and five, I will further study how these points provide useful tools when analyzing *The Birchbark House* series.

In *Mixedblood Messages*, Louis Owens has also written about the deep ecology-related notions of interrelatedness and ecocentrism that are needed instead of egocentrism (11). In deep ecology, such interrelatedness is characterized as interdependence. As Barnhill and Gottlieb (8) emphasize, “[w]e prefer an ecosystem view of environmental thought: health is found in diversity and interdependence. Deep ecology is one among many perspectives, all of which seek to promote the earth and all who dwell upon it.” When analyzing *The Birchbark House* series, the above-mentioned tables of David Kronlid’s categorization of values of nature (Table 2) and David Kronlid’s categorization of ways to relate with nature (Table 3) as well as Barnhill and Gottlieb’s most common features of deep ecology (Table 5) can all be applied when analyzing Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series, as seen in chapters four, five and six. Table 4, however, presenting the deep ecology platform by Arne Naess and George Sessions (McLaughlin 27-28), includes for example modern day technology-based and population policies that are not the key focus in this thesis.

As a philosophy, deep ecology rejects objectification of the natural environment, its exploitation and degradation by consumerism, and it challenges the hierarchy polarizing humans and nature. Dreese further elaborates these thoughts by explaining how the emphasis lies in a mutually reciprocal relationship that does not separate humans and nature. Humans, plants and animals coexist within an intimate system where everything affects everything (5). Such thoughts form the basis of the notion of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue that in addition focuses on the spiritual dimensions of existence and includes in dialogue or Native literary analysis all forms of life, both past and present, such as Ojibwe ancestors and power animals. Dreese adds, how “American Indian environmental philosophies have made a vital impact on the development of ecocriticism” (6). These philosophies hold a mirror to Western capitalist notions of nature exploitation and call for a change before it is too late, and by example, they show the difference between adapting cultures’ needs to the capacities of natural communities and vice versa (Dreese 6).

As summarized by Rainwater in “Haunted by Birds,” deep ecology goes beyond human-centered concerns, by de-centering humankind, and focuses on the possibility of self-realization by understanding the human position as part of the web of life and emphasizing, beyond the limited human ego, the need for caring for all relationships on this planet, whether human or non-human, whether animals, forests or bioregions (156-157).

3.1.3 GLOCAL LANDSCAPES

To properly include the Native voices in the dialogue of deep ecology, or in Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, in addition to the global aspect, we need to focus on the local dimensions that characterize the Native understanding of site-specific, place-related relationships including both humans and non-humans. Hence, the dialogue in the Native context and in Native literary analysis needs to be not only Native Ecologue, which is more generic, but tribal-specific Ecologue, that is, in terms of *The Birchbark House* series, Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.

In Erdrich's writings, *The Birchbark House* series included, one might claim that there is also a pan-tribal dimension to all her writings (see, for example, Laura Coltelli's *Winged Words*, 47-48), yet in each of her novels the locality, with the local language included, is strongly emphasized. Her stories are both embedded and deeply connected to a site-specific, immediate natural environment that becomes the home for her characters and the place where they belong spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. At the same time many of her characters are also in motion, searching for new homelands and new identities or finally returning to their place of origin, such as June in *Love Medicine*: "June walked over it like water and came home" (7) and "So there was nothing to do but cross the water, and bring her home" (367).

Erdrich writes in "A Writer's Beginnings" about locality, about her hometown Wahpeton, in the following manner: "For generations, my family has been knitted into the fabric of Wahpeton, part of its plan even before it was homesteaded. [...] Like the hometowns of so many other writers, probably going all the way back to the beginning of literature, mine is a place that at one time I wanted to escape, but have ever after held close to my heart." (22). Thus, one could say that Erdrich's writings are *glocal* by nature, including both the local and global dimension simultaneously. She writes about locality – her *Birchbark House* saga starts from the shores of Lake Superior and continues all the way to the Great Plains of Dakota – and yet her readership can be pan-tribal or global.

Related to this notion of glocality is the concept of the vernacular and official landscape. In *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* (90-93), Joni Adamson refers to both the vernacular and official landscape and how we can use these two concepts to analyze the powers that are affecting the local landscape. She expands John Brinckerhoff Jackson's notions and describes the official landscape as a governmental- and corporation-based landscape where there is no place for local people, cultures or environments and where people learn to ignore their roots, families and own individual cultures and rather embrace the universal and such aesthetics that transcends time and place. The vernacular landscape, on the other hand, is characterized by local people, home and familiar environments with intimate stories, rhythms and contours, filled with meaning and significance. It is a living, breathing landscape whether urban or rural. The official landscape may cause people to resist or surrender or step into it for different purposes, at times when trying to save their vernacular landscape.

When the above is applied to Erdrich's writings, the characters in *The Birchbark House* series are strongly rooted in the vernacular landscape of

lakes and islands and later the plains, and her stories are local, intimate survival stories and stories of nature relationships and relationships with humans and non-humans. Still, as seen in chapter four, her characters are forced to enter the official landscape of American lawmakers and politicians, pushing the Ojibwe further and further west from their traditional tribal lands to new uncharted territories. Here no place can permanently or fully be called home and American values with Christian undertones prevail. However, although these systems cannot be avoided, they can be used, modified, applied and reformed to ensure Ojibwe survival.

As stated in *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism*, similar to the divide between official and local landscape, theory is usually defined as profound, authoritative, limited to certain academic Anglo-European elite, narrow, and serious by nature, and in opposition, fiction is considered playful, non-serious and imaginative, with multiple voices, rising from the vernacular landscape. Yet, multicultural literature should be dealt with as theoretical work providing insight into how marginalized groups challenge and have always challenged the official landscape of Euro-American hegemony (Adamson 96-97). Similarly, Erdrich teaches by means of local stories, old and new, by recreating the old narratives and allowing people from the official landscape (of Western academia) to enter the vernacular landscape of Ojibwe life, history and worldview. In Erdrich's fiction, we move back and forth between the vernacular and the official, giving us the participatory glocal, the middle place where the oral tradition and the contemporary writing as well as the traditional tribal language and global English can meet. Here there is fertile ground for Native literature theory (or theories) to be developed, not just as a response to the Western models but as a form and concept of its own. Here American Indian Literary Nationalism and more global and mediative approaches may meet and find consensus.

Landscape as such hides much meaning and importance. Adamson analyzes, referring for example to Kent Ryden, the significance of the physical landscape that for a casual observer is that of valleys and mountains but for another includes an invisible landscape of hidden meanings, of lived local importance with mythic tales, songs and narratives (6-7). In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, her stories are deeply embedded in the local Ojibwe land and landscape, her novels breathe the local history with old and new stories and for her characters, all the lakes, islands and forests and the plains are rich with personal meaning that stretch over generations. In her *Birchbark House* saga, especially in characters like Nokomis and Omakayas, she allows her readers to see that vernacular, invisible landscape through her characters' eyes. Dreese states how the sense of place and its relationship to the self are probably nowhere more evident than in such American Indian writers' works as Louise Erdrich, who focuses in her writings on topics like a sense of place, landscape and identity (8-9).

Native landscapes, however, do not recognize Western borders. As Rainwater points out ("Haunted by Birds" 157-158), Ojibwa culture challenges artificial Western boundaries separating humans from one another and the rest of nature. Similarly, in Erdrich's novels such as *The Birchbark House* series, the animate and inanimate world are interconnected, natural and so called supernatural are in constant dialogue, and humans are never separate from the rest of nature with its non-human habitants, forefathers, dodem

animals, seasons and other natural rhythms. There are no artificial boundaries or borders to divide between nature or land and its living beings. In *The Birchbark House* saga, Omakayas and her family members constantly seek the help of their power animals and ancestors to survive the harsh winters and other natural challenges, as described in chapter four. Yet, even if Omakayas and her closest family members live in harmony with the land/nature, despite all the changes they must face, there are counterforces, such as alcoholism, poverty and criminality as well as white settlers, that threaten their daily life and peace. In the later novels, the ominous sense of future danger and fear increases. “Makoons still had a troubled feeling every time he looked east, back to Pembina. He told his brother about this feeling and Chickadee was silent, for he remembered his brother’s dream.” (M 130).

In the anthology called *Native American Wisdom: A Spiritual Tradition at One with Nature*, the editor Alan Jacobs summarizes the Native American wisdom and its relationship with nature/land in the following manner:

The wisdom of Native Americans is profoundly holistic: an all-embracing pantheism pervades every aspect of their richly textured lives, which reflect their sound ecological and environmental beliefs. Their message has an important relevance at this time, when our planet is threatened by cataclysmic change brought about by man’s greed and heedlessness. (xi)

Despite the great diversity among the Native peoples, reverence for the land is something that connects them all, as confirmed by Mick Gidley in Jacobs (3). The Cherokee call the land *eloheh*, which also means culture, history and religion, indicating how these concepts cannot be separated from one another (Jacobs 3). Jacobs further claims that this veneration of the earth, in line with modern ecological thinking, is not present only in Indian verbal expressions but also part of their form (4). “The earth and myself are of one mind,” said Chief Joseph of Nez Percé (Jacobs 5).

Jacobs also quotes Ojibwa George Copway’s, Chief Kah-ge-gah-bowh’s (1818-63), words that describe how he was born in nature’s wide domain as one of her children and she was his glory and everlasting love with her seasons, stately oaks and evergreen hair (85). Also, Vine Deloria Jr. describes in *The World We Used to Live In*, addressing many different Native cultures, how traditional Indians always learned and gathered insights of the natural world, and, referring to Luther Standing Bear (Oglala Lakota), he states how the Indians were in tune with the rhythms of nature and having an understanding of earthways. Old people loved the soil and “they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power.” (xxxi). In *The Birchbark House* series, such an elder is Nokomis, Omakayas’s beloved grandmother and family healer, who lay down and rested in her garden before leaving this world and walking lightly towards west (M 125). Referring to the Omaha thinking, Deloria states how many tribes believed that an invisible and continuous life permeated all seen and unseen things, and how life made all things move and also created more permanent forms and structures, such as mountains, rivers and lakes (198). He describes, referring to the words of Standing Bear, how people said that the earth with the mountains talked to them, and how the wind had life (xxxi-xxxii). Throughout *The Birchbark House* series, as discussed in chapter four, Omakayas and the other Ojibwe are in constant

holistic dialogue, or Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, with their land, with all its beings, human and non-human alike, and also with all the otherworldly beings, operating beyond time and space.

The elders made sense of the world, such as the Chippewa landscape, by empirical observations, studying the motions of the sun and moon, winds, rains and snow, and by observing unusual events and dreams, where they discussed with animals or plants for advice. Deloria continues, how some individuals were also known for their special insights and experiences as medicine men and women or holy men and women (xxiv-xxv), and in their stories, they shared their knowledge of reading, for example, the clouds and winds (xxxi). These elements are present throughout *The Birchbark House* series as well, especially in the character of Nokomis who is teaching Omakayas how to become a medicine woman skilled in reading nature/land and providing healing and help for her tribal members. However, the erosion of the old ways is such that the overwhelming majority of Indian people in today's secular world have little understanding of the wisdom and ceremonies their forefathers kept for thousands of years (Deloria xvii). This being the case, Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series also serves as an act of cultural preservation and teaching for younger Ojibwe today.

There is a great variety of Native American cultures and many different ways of life for Native people. As Mick Gidley explains in Jacobs (5), the Indian stereotype of a cruel war-painted Plains warrior, at times drunk or stupid, makes it difficult for us to conceive of the variety and complexity of Native American cultures. Dreese adds, how there are romantic, idealized, calcifying and undermining images of Natives as people already in tune with nature in posters and greeting cards, with hair blowing, gazing into the distance (114). Therefore, to diffuse assumptions and to clear stereotypes as well as to fight Western power paradigm, postcolonial thought, ecocriticism, and theories on the sense of place are required (Dreese 115).

What is also required is to give voice to those whose stories have not been heard so far. Omakayas's voice represents a young Ojibwe female's life story, an individual voice, rising from history still too often dominated by white male versions. Similarly, Erdrich respects the unheard elders by showing the importance of such Ojibwe women as Nokomis. The characters created by Erdrich, even if fictional, are powerful multi-dimensional portraits of the Ojibwe that express their emotions, desires, hopes, ambitions and challenges. In addition to Omakayas and her link with Erdrich's own family tree, some other characters are also based on historical people, such as Father Baraga and trader Cadotte (Stirrup 183-184). Similarly, Kimberly Blaeser describes the women in her community as powerful and strong, women were the ones who carried the stories, they were teachers and they held the families together. Women were the ones who ensured that others survived. (Andrews 18). As described by Seema Kurup concerning *The Birchbark House* characters, "[t]he idyllic superficial portrayals of the noble savage or the depictions of primitive Native American characters encountered in much popular fiction are nowhere to be found. These are real flesh-and-blood people." (77).

3.2 BOHMIAN DIALOGUE AND CIRCLES AND CYCLES: SPINNING TOWARD NATIVE ECOLOGUE

In the chapter 3.1, I discussed the development of ecocriticism and deep ecology and the notions of glocal as well as official and vernacular landscape and I also referred to the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue that will be further analyzed in this and the following chapters. I will now look closer at David Bohm's views on dialogue and Donald L Fixico's and Hartmut Lutz's understanding of Native circles and cycles to see how these elements can be integrated in the concept of Native Ecologue and how they can, in the cultural context of the Ojibwe, be also applied in connection with Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.

3.2.1 DIALOGUE: SHARING IN A CIRCLE

As analyzed in this part of the thesis, dialogue is by nature a multi-faceted process, and it is needed when we try to understand our relationship to this world. In traditional Native American thinking, one's closest people form a circle, and in addition human-animal relations are cherished and the life of plants is respected. Within the circle of life, balance is continuously sought by individuals and communities by listening and sharing and with silence and patience. Instead of focusing on cause and effect, the more traditional Native American mind tries to understand relationships, and in Native storytelling, such participatory thought is essential.

Although stated rather simply through the medium of children's fiction, nevertheless the Ojibwe worldview and values implied by *The Birchbark House* series have certain parallels with advanced thinking in recent research in the natural sciences. David Bohm, a quantum physicist, philosopher and theoretician, presents in *On Dialogue* (1996) [referred to in this thesis as *ODi*, not to confuse it with Owens's *Other Destinies* (*OD*)] thoughts that strongly connect with Owens's concept of eco-centrism and the sharing of cultural knowledge: "This sharing of mind, of consciousness, is more important than the content of the opinions. [...] I think this new approach could open the way to changing the whole world situation – ecologically and in other ways." (*ODi* 35). As is visible also in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* saga, where sharing everything is the key to survival, Bohm's ideas of equality and sharing are also closely related with the mode of traditional Ojibwe social organization, lacking any central and hierarchal authority and rather emphasizing co-operation, sharing for survival and harmonious conduct among the Ojibwe, humans and non-humans included. Bohm developed his thoughts in close co-operation with, for example, Blackfoot elder Leroy Little Bear, former dean of the Native American program at Harvard.

Another scholar whose ideas also focus on the concept of nature and holistic thinking in the Native context is Donald L. Fixico, Distinguished Foundation Professor of History at Arizona State University and the previous Thomas Bowlus Distinguished Professor of American Indian History at the University of Kansas, who has published on Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek and

Seminole traditions and sees that Indian holistic thinking is strongly based on the centrality of circles and cycles in the world and the fact that all things, physical and metaphysical, are related to one another in this universe, in the continuum of energy and spirit, transformation and synergy. In *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* (2003), Fixico discusses broadly such themes as oral tradition and traditional knowledge, American Indian circular philosophy, Native American intellectualism and Native scholars in academia.⁴¹ I now intend to cross-study both David Bohm's views on dialogue and Donald L Fixico's thoughts on Native cycles and circles and how these two are interlinked with the development of the concept Native Ecologue and Native (Tribal) Ecologue.

Dialogue is by nature a versatile process, and for Bohm, its goal is to create something new together rather than convincing others of one's own point of view. Bohm (viii) argues that despite its claims to pursue "truth," scientific endeavor is often clouded with personal ambition, a rigid defense of theory, and with the weight of tradition this hinders creative participation toward any shared goals of science. The true purpose of any dialogue is to speak without prejudice, without trying to overly influence one another (3). "We are not playing a game against each other, but *with* each other. In a dialogue, everybody wins." (*ODi* 7, emphasis original). Bohm's thoughts connect with the concepts of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue and deep ecology where humans and the rest of nature/land are always interdependent and inseparable – they cannot play against each other but only with each other, in dialogue. To truly understand Native cultures and Native writings we also have to let go of our Western-based, rigid scientific understanding of theory and tradition and embrace the position of the Other, the creative position of not-knowing,

This also applies to the notion of language. In *Pathways for Remembering and Recognizing Indigenous Thought in Education: Philosophies of Iethi'nihténha Ohwentsia'kékha (Land)*, Sandra D. Styres claims that Indigenous languages, unlike noun-based Western languages, are by nature relational, expressive, spiritual, and verb-oriented. They are process-focused and an articulation of self-in-relationship with a world in flux. For her, there is a circular and interconnected relationship between language, thought, and reality. Indigenous languages have a direct influence on Indigenous thought and Indigenous thought informs the ways language is used. In this way, thought and language are intimately connected in the ways Indigenous people think about and understand self-in-relationship in this world. (148-151). Louise Erdrich has written about Ojibwemowin for *The New York Times* in "Two Languages in Mind, but Just One in the Heart" (22.5.2000):

Ojibwemowin is one of the few surviving languages that evolved to the present here in North America. The intelligence of this language is adapted as no other to the philosophy bound up in northern land, lakes, rivers, forests and plains; to the animals and their particular habits; to the shades of meaning in the very placement of stones. As a North American

⁴¹ Donald L. Fixico uses such expressions as "Indian Thinking" and American Indian cultural philosophy, yet also Native American studies etc. In this thesis, when quoting Fixico, I use the expression in that form that he uses it in the specific context.

writer it is essential to me that I try to understand our human relationship to place in the deepest way possible, using my favorite tool, language.⁴²

When trying to understand self in relationship to this world, as mentioned by Erdrich above and as is common in Native cultural traditions, Bohm recommends that we engage in dialogue by sitting in a circle, since “[s]uch a geometric arrangement doesn’t favor anybody” (15). Such circular approach includes circular philosophy of balance and harmony. Fixico points this out in the following manner:

The circular approach assures that everyone understands, and that all is considered, thereby increasing the chance for harmony and balance in the community and with everything else. As each person or being relates to the focal point, and if lines were drawn to indicate this relatedness, then the results would be the spokes of a wheel, and all the participants are encircled by the unity of this experience. This might be called an “Internal Model.” (16)

For Fixico, the “Internal Model” with its circular approach can include persons, families and clans, a community with tribal culture and network, and a tribal nation that can also be in conflict with external forces (16), as is the case in *The Birchbark House* series, where the white settler community is the counterforce to Omakayas’s traditional Ojibwe lifestyle. Thus, the “Internal Model” with equal spokes in the wheel of survival and empowerment resonates with both Owens’s and Bohm’s understanding of dialogue and with the concept of Native Ecology, where participation and relatedness of land, humans, animals and spirits in different layers of existence is emphasized. This notion of relatedness is exemplified by trickster Nanapush’s words in *Tracks*: “And yet we old-time Indians were like this, long-thinking but in the last, forgiving, as we must live close together, as one people, share what we have in common, take what we’re owed [...]” (180). In such circle with equal spokes, small and big things are of equal value. Erdrich writes: “I tell myself that God and meaning are in the small things as well as in the vast.” (*BaI* 7). Similarly, in *Chickadee*, Nokomis chastises Chickadee for not respecting the power of a small bird (27).

As part of the “Internal Model,” one’s closest people also form a circle, and Native people traditionally believe in the importance of the family and the clan, the importance of communal identity, common welfare and cooperation. Fixico describes such thinking in the following manner:

The American Indian mind thinks inclusively. By seeing and believing that all things are related, this natural order is a sociocultural kinship. It is symbolic kinship based on the ethos of totality and inclusion. It includes even the bad or evil things. Kinship is the bonding substance that holds the Natural Democracy system together. Kinships are formed by symbolic relationships and by blood relationships. (48)

⁴² Erdrich, Louise. Writers on Writing. “Two Languages in Mind, but Just One in the Heart.” *The New York Times*, 22.5.2000. (archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/books/052200erdrich-writing.html).

This broader view of life means that those Native Americans who are aware of their cultural traditions see things not only in human-to-human context but see how the circle of life also includes “animals, plants, the natural environment, and the metaphysical world of visions and dreams” (Fixico 2). Fixico mentions how Navajo surgeon Lori Alvord’s father communicated both with crows and rez dogs that “appeared magically, just like those annoying friends who materialize at mealtime” (48). Supernatural or spirit animals are present in Erdrich’s stories as well, as discussed in chapter four. Both Omakayas and her brother Quill have even several such spirit animals, for example the bear, the porcupine, the eagle and the chickadee, that protect them, give them guidance and provide wisdom and shelter when needed.

The traditional Native respect and equality included human-animal relations but even the life of plants was respected. Fixico writes: “Many eastern woodland tribes and some western tribes developed clans represented by animal and plant totems practicing group protection, guardianship, and unity of the group” (53). Traditional Indians maintained rituals and traditions for protection, unseen or supernatural powers included. Sharing was also one form of protection. Fixico states how the Ojibwe and other woodland hunters shared their game to avoid being cursed or bewitched by other hunters – it was better to share than cause envy and jealousy in one’s tribal family (53-54). In *The Birchbark House* series, in the times of starvation and harsh winters, the families share their game, food and healing herbs and seeds to support one another and if required, they are even ready to give their lives for the protection of others. One such story is that of Old Tallow who is guided by her bear spirit and saves the rest of her family from winter starvation. “Old Tallow had been just. She had known exactly how long to live. When her life would count the most, she freely gave it. She was proof, in her love, of a love greater than we know.” (TPY 179). According to Fixico, such practices have promoted tribal survival and empowerment unlike the present-day wasteful practices that cause “technological progress to work against world conservation” (55). The above-mentioned elements are very similar to the thoughts by Owens and Bohm and they also characterize the notion of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, with the Ojibwe concept of Seven Fires and the need for a responsible usage of technology, as analyzed by Michael D. McNally in *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority and Ojibwe Religion* and as discussed in different chapters of this thesis.

Within the circle of life, balance is continuously sought by individuals and communities, and for Fixico such balance is the purpose of life in Native American philosophy (48-49). Equilibrium and compromise are searched for when trying to find balance in oneself, within one’s family, within the community or a people, with other nations and the spiritual world and with the universe and one’s environment. This balance represents the opposite of chaos, negativity and disorder, as also expressed by Bohm in *On Dialogue*. Fixico elaborates, how “[c]haos is frustration in life, anxiety, and disappointment. Such disorder leads to fear, distrust, and, ultimately, to self-destruction. Without effort on our part, it is easy to fall into disorder and chaos. Like evil twins, they are the negativity in the universe.” (49). Similarly, in Ojibwe tradition trickster Nanabozho stands for light, even if he wears a grimace on his face and causes some creative chaos, and he also has his counterpart, a dark witch. The struggle between a dark wa’pano and a culture

hero, such as White Rabbit, or Nanapush, is a very common theme in Ojibwe stories (McCafferty 735-736). In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, the enemy is no longer just other tribes or peoples but it is defined as bad people, independent of their background, as well as those who are after the land, the white people. Another enemy is that of trader's milk, alcohol, which hastens "our own destruction sometimes" (M 88). "Remember LaPautre? The drunken skwebii who stole everything from us back in Minnesota? The pitiless man! How he made us suffer." (M 88). Turtle Mountain Ojibwe James Vukelich explains in his online teachings how the dualistic notion of good and bad does not really fit the Ojibwe worldview, rather we need to talk about balance. Since from the Ojibwe point of view, humans are from the earth and they are the earth, humans are not detrimental to the earth as such. Instead of the perspective of good and evil, the Ojibwe perspective means living in balance, and as the present pandemic shows, this is not what we are seeing now.⁴³

The circle and the notion of balance are interlinked. The circle was seen as the basis of the "Indian Way of Life," or the "Human Being Way of Life" also by the late Philip Deere, spiritual leader of the American Indian Movement. Hartmut Lutz quotes his famous words in "The Circle as a Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction:"

The entire Indian Civilization was built from the study of nature [...] Study the history – it is good to understand history...And that's why you hear the Indian people talking about the sacred hoop – or the circle. That circle is important to us because we do not believe in the square measurements. But the ancient belief was in the circle. The moon is in a circle, the sun is round, and our ancestors knew the earth was round. Everything that is natural is in a round form. So, to this day, I haven't seen a square apple. I haven't seen square peaches, I haven't seen a square coconut, I haven't seen anybody with a square head. All natural things come in the form of a circle. (195)

The circle is central to Louise Erdrich's writing, where story cycles and family sagas extend over many generations. This is true both in terms of her writings for the adult readers and in her novels for young adults – for example, she applies in her novels *The Birchbark House* and *The Game of Silence* a circular, season-based structure in her chapters, starting the story in Neebin (Summer) and ending it with Zeegwun (Spring), the final chapter being called "Full Circle" in *The Birchbark House* and "The Return and The Departure" in *The Game of Silence*. This is discussed in chapter four. In this thesis, both Bohm's and Fixico's pan-tribal views are interlinked under Native Ecologue and when they are studied and discussed in the context of the Ojibwe worldview, as far as they resonate with Ojibwe culture, they are part of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.

⁴³ Vukelich, James. "Ojibwe Word of the Day." Aki. 'Earth, land, ground.' Shared in social media 25.4.2020. (www.facebook.com/jamesvukelichkaagegaabaw/).

The linear mind focuses on cause and effect, whereas the more traditional Indian mind tries to understand relationships (Fixico 8). Such understanding includes seeing and listening. “Seeing” refers to understanding the universe as a whole, and this realization is possible only by patience, through visions, dreams or other unusual experiences or with the help of mediators who operate between the physical and metaphysical reality (Fixico 3), and “listening” does not necessarily involve only hearing sound vibrations but also a realization of relationships and their importance in life, which reflects the Natural Order of Life based on respect (Fixico 4).

In *The Birchbark House* series, Omakayas and her family members are encouraged to listen, see and share their visions and knowledge of the land and its inhabitants with one another. Nokomis patiently guides and teaches Omakayas so that she may become a powerful Ojibwe healer and storyteller. In *The Game of Silence*, silence and patience are practiced in many ways. For example, the children learn to respect the grown-ups and their meetings by playing the Game of Silence and the Ojibwe meet the imminent changes and challenges to their lifestyle with patience and tolerance. As seen in chapter four, Erdrich’s saga includes many vision quests, visions of ancestors saving Omakayas’s family members and power animals coming visible for the Ojibwe who practice patience for the sake of their survival.

Listening, sharing, silence, and patience are all interrelated and needed. Silence allows us to reflect and self-examine our thoughts and beliefs and seek balance in ourselves, and it is also a test of patience (Fixico 5). Listening, sharing, silence and patience (Bohm’s notion of suspension is very similar to that of patience) promote individual, tribal and cultural survival and empowerment. In *The Birchbark House*, “[e]ach man, as he drew in the smoke, wore a look of concentrated and peaceful attention. The pipe passed around the circle twice before any of the men said a word.” (76). For Bohm, “[e]ven in relationships with inanimate objects and with nature in general, something very like communication is involved.” (3). So, in Erdrich’s novels, the pipe and the Ojibwe are part of creative sharing and participatory dialogue.

However, in Native traditions, beings are more than just connected. Rather, the observer and the observed, the storyteller and the audience become one. “People in such cultures felt that they were participating in some of the things that they saw – that everything in the world was participating, and that the spirit of things was all one [...]. Another way to illustrate participatory thought is to imagine that we are talking together [...].” (Bohm 84). Bohm also refers to philosopher Krishnamurti’s thoughts about the observer being the observed, “[...] at a certain stage the distinction between the observer and the observed cannot be maintained” (70). In *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, Erdrich describes how the Ojibwe people became one with the lake:

His [Tobasonakwut’s] people were the lake, and the lake was them. At one time, everyone who lived near the lake was essentially made of the lake. As the people lived off fish, animals, the lake’s water and water plants for medicine, they were literally cell by cell composed of the lake and the lake’s islands. Tobasonakwut’s father once said to him, *The creator is the lake and we are the waves on the lake.* (34; emphasis original)

If we in fact are partaking of the planet, it would be absurd to plunder it (Bohm 86). As Bohm sees it, participatory thought characterizes, for example, tribes with totem animals; the tribe and the totem are one and “[p]articipatory thought sees that everything partakes of everything” (87). For Bohm, “literal thought” is by nature scientific, technical and result-oriented, whereas “participatory thought” is characterized by permeable boundaries, “[...] objects have an underlying relationship with one another, and the movement of the perceptible world is sensed as participating in some vital essence” (xvi), which refers especially to tribal cultures.

In Native storytelling, such participatory thought is essential – the stories come into existence when shared with the tribal audience, and each teller adds something new to the storytelling tradition, thus keeping the story alive. In *The Truth about Stories*, Thomas King writes: “I’ve heard this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes.” (1). Basil H. Johnston claims that in Ojibwe culture, “[t]o foster individuality and self-growth, children and youth were encouraged to draw their own inferences from the stories. No attempt was made to impose upon them views [...]” (*Ojibway Heritage* 70). In Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series, the previously unheard stories of and by children are many and they can heal themselves when finally being heard.

To summarize, in addition to giving space for the stories to be heard and healed, dialogue is important because we also suffer from the social and personal fragmentation of culture that does not promote creative co-operation but creates cultural and geographical distinctions (Bohm viii). Bohm sees that “[t]he whole ecological problem is due to thought, because we have thought that the world is there for us to exploit, that it is infinite, and so no matter what we did, the pollution would all get dissolved away.” (10). Thoughts can cause destruction and fragmentation, when things that are not in real life separate, are broken up “[...] into bits, as if they were independent” (Bohm 49).

In *The Birchbark House* series, exploitation and fragmentation becomes detrimental when Omakayas’s family is attacked by four ragged Anishinabeg, mixed-bloods, one white man and Omakayas’s alcoholic uncle LaPautre, who no longer cares about the common good and shared survival but rather is ready to sacrifice his own family for temporary material gain (*TPY* 94-97). Erdrich is not blaming anyone with her story but rather she is showing how social and personal fragmentation, alcohol and poverty cause people, any people, to act in desperate and destructive ways and choose ego rather than eco. At its best positive dialogue with its circles can have a ripple effect, as expressed by Kimberly Blaeser who in her interview with Jennifer Andrews talks about the spider’s web and the notions of vibration, multiplicity of dimensions and the essence of movement being a continuum and in this way she takes the notion of circle even further (Andrews 20).

Below, in Figure 1, I have summarized some of the key thoughts by David Bohm, under Bohmian dialogue, concerning his understanding of the nature of dialogue, and I have especially emphasized the points that are related to Native Ecologue, as a tool for Native literary analysis. These points include such concepts as internal and external harmony, sharing of mind, meaning and consciousness and common participation with participatory thought. Also, when thoughts are shared in a circle, all have a chance for equal participation – this is a win-win situation – and when promoting freedom

from ego, it is easier to value interdependence and ecocentrism and appreciate the different roads, the different ways to approach the concept of truth or rather truths. When these more generic thoughts related to Native Ecologue are then studied within the cultural context of Ojibwe writing and storytelling in Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, we look more specifically what for example common participation with participatory thought means when analyzing Ojibwe stories and Ojibwe literature, such as Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series. This is further discussed in chapter four.

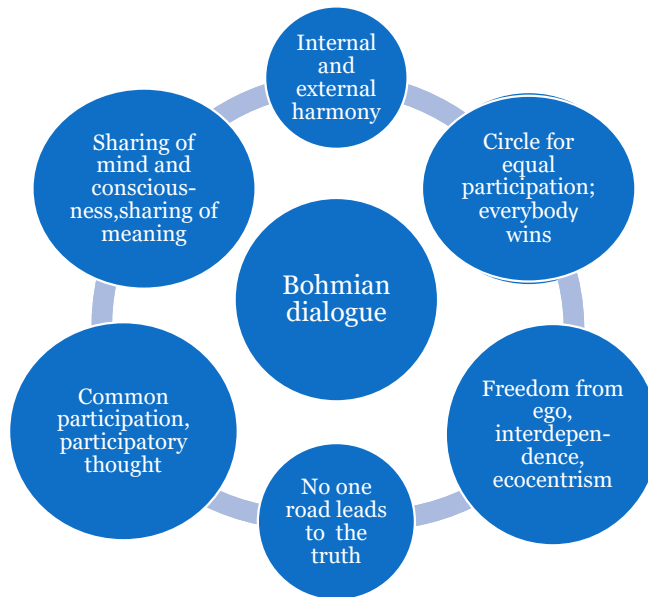


Figure 1. Bohmian dialogue with some of its key points related to Native Ecologue.

3.2.2 EVERYDAY CYCLES, LANDMARKS OF LITERATURE AND SIGNS OF PRESENCE

In addition to dialogue, traditional tribal holistic knowledge, with its notions of time and space, is strongly based on everyday practicalities “in relationship to an environment and its climate” (Fixico 12). Dreese states, how for many Native American cultures time and place are “fluid multidimensional spheres rather than linear planes of existence” (114). Yet, in all story cycles and circles, land is always the crucial point in the narratives. Thus, understanding the importance of cycles and landmarks is essential when analyzing traditional Native stories.

The traditional Ojibwe cycle and circle of a year with its four seasons, from Neebin (summer) to Zeegwun (spring), is followed in *The Birchbark House* series, especially the first two novels, *The Birchbark House* and *The Game of Silence*. Erdrich mentions how the number four has a special meaning for the Ojibwe. “In every Ojibwe ceremony, the number four is sacred – four seasons, four directions, four phases of life, four of everything.” (*BaI* 42). Erdrich adds how the number four relates, for example, to the fourth degree of Mide practice and the Mide lodge (*BaI* 55), to one’s travel from this life to the next that also lasts four days (*BaI* 61) and to the *sasawkwe*, the war whoop, that was raised four times (*BaI* 60). In an interview with Hertha D. Wong, Erdrich mentions, how number four is “[...] the number of completion in Ojibway mythology [...] so four is a *good* number” (45, emphasis original). Also, in sweat lodge ceremony, the women brought in the grandfather rocks four times and prayed to each direction (*TGoS* 137-138). And when it was time for Nokomis to leave this world and walk lightly westwards, Omakayas’s family lighted the ceremony fire and kept it burning for four days (*M* 127), since according to the Ojibwe tradition, the journey to the spirit world took four days. The four directions are also mentioned in *The Game of Silence*: “Nokomis had taught her (Omakayas) to sing several songs. One song was about the four directions – east, south, west, north. She sang to each of the directions at sunrise and sunset.” (227). Also, in chapter 3.3 the importance of number four is mentioned in connection with the Seven Grandfathers.

Hartmut Lutz (196) mentions how the elements of cyclical change and change of time are also essential when we talk about cycles. Time here is not linear but exists rather in a never-ending pattern that keeps repeating itself in people’s lives – the menstrual cycle of women by moon’s twenty-eight-day rhythm, the ebb and flow of the sea, the growth of plants and so on. Fixico encourages people to enter nature, the circle of the universe with its beauty, and such notion of time where “[t]here was no need to be aware of anything more than the changing seasons” (51). For Native holistic or circular perception, the European way of dividing the world into the physical and the spiritual is a bewildering and alien concept, and we Westerners might find it difficult to grasp how the natural and supernatural are one and humans are part of both within the same circle. Fixico also emphasizes how in traditional Native logic “[t]he whole is greater than any one of its parts.” (47).

Hartmut Lutz describes in “The Circle as a Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction” in *Approaches: Essays in Native North American Studies and Literatures* (200-201) how the oral tradition has suffered great setbacks partly because Native people have been removed and expelled from their land and regions that have been an integral part of their spiritual practices. This has also been seen in Native literature with the appearance of such themes as alienation and the struggle for survival. *The Birchbark House* series describes the crucial time in the lives of the Ojibwe, when they have to leave their homelands and move to the Great Plains, which means for them a whole new way of life and a new relationship to a different landscape, a story landscape included.

As far as the traditional Native worldview goes, Fixico writes how “[r]eality for Indian people and their communities is very different from the reality of non-Indians. This combined reality of the physical environment and metaphysical environment reflect the people’s belief in a combined reality.

Stories convey this reality of spiritual beings interacting with people on a regular basis.” (34). In all her *Birchbark House* series novels, Erdrich writes about the meeting of physical realities with the metaphysical landscape in simple, straightforward language allowing also non-Natives to take a glimpse at such combined reality. In *The Birchbark House* series, supernatural is natural – spirit animals are the community’s constant companions, they help and support when the family is starving, the ancestors or at times little people save them from drowning and the dreams are given to understand one’s path and purpose. Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue means here also a natural dialogue, an everyday dialogue between Gizhe Manidoo, humans, spirit and non-spirit animals, little people and forefathers, as in *The Porcupine Year*, when Omakayas and her brother Quill are saved after a dangerous river journey. “Yet here they were. Saved by the spirits, Manidoog, kept safe by the Gizhe Manidoo, the greatest and kindest one, or perhaps by the whim of the chill Manidoog who lived in the stones.” (21).

Another example of such combined reality of physical rocks and a metaphysical offering is presented by Erdrich in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (2003), where she describes how “Before anything else, we go visit Niiyaawaangashing [...] ‘Hundreds of Anishinaabeg were conceived on that rock,’ says Tobasonakwut. I look at the grey hollow in the rock – it actually looks pretty comfortable. Nobody lives at Niiyaawaangashing anymore, except the bears and eagles, and so we stop only long enough to put down tobacco.” (35). In addition to the boulder, there used to be a Midewiwin or Grand Medicine lodge in Niiyaawaangashing but nowadays there are only two fish-camp houses standing and a cabin of weathered wood (*BaI* 35-36). As Fixico (31) points out, the earth has provided Native people with natural sacred places of power and knowledge, such as Mount Taylor, Blue Lake of the Taos, and Bear Butte that have become important landmarks for many Native writers, for example Leslie Marmon Silko and Scott Momaday, and there are also other than traditional written sources providing evidence of Native history. “Over time, Native Americans have supplied some written evidence of their natural world and events. Early written evidence includes petroglyphs, rock writing or rock art, and hide paintings.” (Fixico 31). Sean Teuton also mentions petroglyphs: Native Americans’ practical writing systems of petroglyphs or birch bark rolls served as mnemonic devices for oral narratives that with dance and music describe for example origins, social customs or religious values, whereas other stories were for often humorous entertainment (3). Erdrich refers to such Ojibwe rock paintings in *Books and Islands*. She talks about how the wild rice is depicted in such rock paintings:

This is a feminine-looking drawing. The language of wild rice harvest is intensely erotic and often comically sexualized. If the stalk is floppy, it is a poor erection [...]. Everything is sexual, the way of the world is to be sexual, and it is good (although often ridiculous). The great teacher of Anishinaabeg, whose intellectual prints are also on this rock, was a being called Nanabozho, or Winabojó. He was wise, he was clever, he was a sexual idiot, a glutton, full of miscalculations and bravado. He gave medicines to the Ojibwe, one of the primary being laughter. (53-54)

The importance of the pictographic marks/signs/presence that Anishinaabe people left/leave/find on rock and elsewhere is described by Heid E. Erdrich, Louise Erdrich's sister, in "Name' Literary Ancestry as Presence":

The Anishinaabe word name' is a verb transitive animate and means to "find/leave signs of somebody's presence." While engaging in research in order to recover an Ojibwe tradition of writing in English, I find landmarks of literature, signs of presence, and draw them toward my understanding of the Anishinaabe word name'. (14)

She continues: "What helps us know a place? Landmarks. What helps us know a people? The marks/signs they leave, that we find. These marks and landmarks help us follow their path across a landscape of time [...] When we find what another leaves, we are connected across time [...] We follow our literary ancestors – not with a destination in mind, not with intent to claim territory, but because we want to know who has gone before us, who now guides us. We take comfort in their signs of presence along our way." (14.) For Erdrich, to write about Omakayas and her family is to reconnect with her circle, her own ancestors across time and space: "My mother, Rita Gourneau Erdrich, and my sister Lise Erdrich, researched our family life and found ancestors on both sides who lived on Madeline Island during the time in which this book is set. [...] The name Omakayas appears on a Turtle Mountain census. I am using it in the original translation because I've been told those old names should be given life. [...] This book and those that will follow are an attempt to retrace my own family's history." (*TBH*, Thanks and Acknowledgments).

Stories are present through different landmarks, and in the Native context, stories are equated with survival. Stories had and have power and energy and they are and were means of maintaining virtues, values and morals in the tribe or a people. They preserve(d) tribal history, teachings, wisdoms, and laughter and they are also for healing. "For American Indians, stories live on, and they will live longer than all of us." (Fixico 37). And stories, like the reality we experience, are in a state of constant change, "[...] even the story that we remember being told, but as long as the fabric of the truths of a story are retained, then we can accept it" (Fixico 44). In her words of dedication in *Tracks*, Erdrich states,

*"[...] The story comes up different
every time and has no ending [...]"*

Similarly, in her *Books and Islands*, Erdrich talks about both "book-islands" (3), that is rock paintings and dental birch bark pictographs, and modern books as ancestral yet modern libraries of the contemporary Ojibwe that tell and retell the stories of the Ojibwe people, with no end.

One theme that appears in such rock paintings is the turtle, as mentioned in Dewdney's and Kidd's *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes* (43), which as a concept is also related to the cycles and circles of the Native cultures. Erdrich mentions, how the turtle or "[t]he mikinaak has immense significance in Ojibwe life. As there are thirteen plates in its back, it is associated with the

thirteen moons in the yearly cycle, and also with women.” (*BaI* 62). In “The Circle as a Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction,” Hartmut Lutz mentions the turtle in his analysis of the circle in Native American fiction when he refers to Joseph Bruchac’s anthology of contemporary Native American poetry. Bruchac called his anthology *Songs from this Earth on Turtle’s Back*, thus relating poems to their origin. In pan-Indian usage, “Turtle Island” refers to the North American continent, and even if turtle’s back is not a perfect geometrical circle, it shares the roundness, the completeness and the interlocked form of a circle. (Lutz 195). Turtle is also an important figure in Erdrich’s own life – she is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, and in her *Birchbark House* series, in *Makoons*, after Nokomis’s death, the family travels towards the Turtle Mountains, an area with low hills, surrounded by the plains and rich in game, fish, berries, nuts and oak, poplar and birch trees and a fragrance that reminds Ojibwe of home (129-130).

In terms of Native American fiction, the circle can also reflect, as earlier mentioned, the structural evaluation of Erdrich’s novels, as in *The Birchbark House* and in *The Game of Silence*. Hartmut Lutz analyzes this notion in the following manner:

The circle paradigm would test how far the structures of novels retain a tribal, circular mode or whether they follow non-Native linear, causal structures. The circle has both the power of a vortex, drawing individuals into itself, and that of a spinning wheel turning at high velocity, with strong centrifugal powers whirling individuals off its circular path to send them shooting off in linear courses into a vast cultural void. (203)

These qualities of a spinning wheel or of a vortex are also mentioned by Fixico, who refers to history as “a continuum without a beginning or an end in the Indian mind” (45) and if this continuum becomes broken by forgetfulness – “because people are forgetting about the ways of the spirit and the ways of kindness to people” (45) – people’s visions disappear in the vortex of greed and lust for power and money and together with those visions vanishes Indian way and philosophy of life, “centered around the spirits and around the Creator. All of it.” (46). Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* novels remind her Native and non-Native audience of the Ojibwe history and the ways people survived and also of the ways that risked their lives if greed or desire for power, or liquor, became more important than shared good, as in the case of the unfortunate character of LaPautre. The notions of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue and ecocentrism, rather than ‘egologue’ and egocentrism, embrace the concept of existential continuum and the sacred hoop, as written by Paula Gunn Allen, that includes and embraces all life forms, equal in their value and contribution. As Erdrich puts it, all things, small things included, have great power (*C* 27), as shown in chapter four.

Cycles and circles also carry the sign of the Great Spirit. William J. Scheick refers in “Narrative and Ethos in Erdrich’s ‘A Wedge of Shade’” to the circle and cycle as part of Native American writers’, such as Louise Erdrich’s and Thomas King’s, works: “This cyclic feature of Native American ceremonial time, frequently represented as a circle, is as structurally important in

Erdrich's artistic use of Chippewa culture as it is in King's artistic use of Blackfeet culture." (124). Scheick also further comments on the Ojibwe circle by confirming that "[...] the circle (in whole or in part) is the sign of the Great Spirit evident nearly everywhere in natural phenomena, including organic cycles" (124). In her article "Generative Adversity: Shapeshifting Pauline/Leopolda in *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*," Kate McCafferty sees in Erdrich's writing "an interactive flow of relationships between individual humans, animals, animal-faced clan guardians, spirits of the land, the dead, and the sacred individuals from the eight cosmic tiers" (732). Like in Owens's and Bohm's writings, all forms of life "are essential to the great round of life" (McCafferty 733). There is creativity in these mutually reciprocal interrelationships, between the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the local bioregion, the larger world (Grim 52).

Even the stories in Erdrich's novels reflect this same cyclical reality; the shared tribal stories are intertwined, they curve and cross one another like spring rivers, with undefined starting and ending points. "Her fragmented narratives are broken circles, piecemeal arcs, all apparently mysteriously inclined toward some distant completion or revelation." (Scheick 126). The story line in *The Birchbark House* series is "broken" or its flow is expanded by ancient stories that mix with the life stories of Omakayas and her family, as discussed in chapter four. And yet, as stated by Bradford, the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's writing is clearly visible in the treatment of land: for Indigenous authors, land is always a crucial point in their narratives (197). This is true in Erdrich's novels as well – land provides the pivotal point in all her cyclical and at times fragmented stories.

3.2.3 FIXICO'S "INDIAN THINKING" AND NATIVE ECOLOGUE

In this part of the thesis I summarize Fixico's notion of "Indian Thinking" (in Figure 2 below) and I also visualize some of the key elements of Native dialogue or Native Ecologue, based on the previously elaborated thoughts and theoretical views.

As shown below in Figure 2, stories form Native American reality, where the physical and the metaphysical meet in a time continuum, and Native wisdom, with its rituals and protective traditions, is based on tribal cultures. In listening, sharing, silence and patience lies the power of stories and oral tradition, and the Circle of Life provides tribal holistic knowledge and equal sociocultural kinship. And at all times, there is the continuum of energy and spirit, transformation and synergy as well as continuous interaction between different beings and their environment.

For Fixico, "[t]he main quest for American Indians, as it has remained through the generations, is the quest for survival and balance in life" (58). In addition, Fixico reminds the reader that "[i]nstead of looking ahead, we as all people should look around us" (58). Studying our surroundings and all our relations gives us a clearer picture of our future as well. As explained earlier,

both Owens and Bohm, as well as the concepts of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, call for a similar focus.

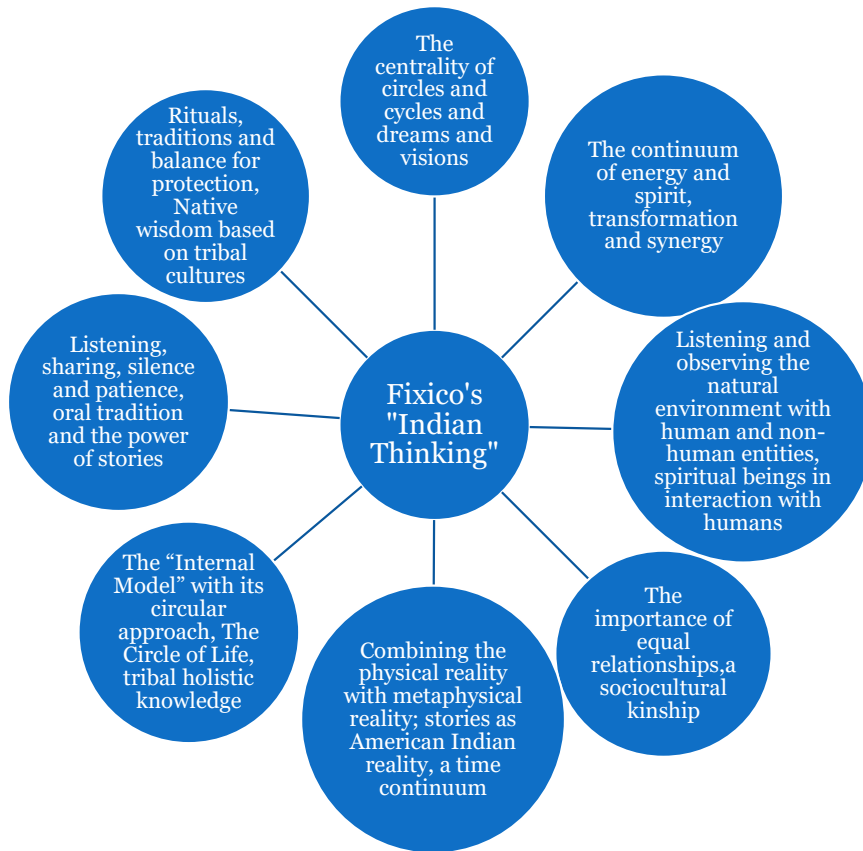


Figure 2. Fixico's "Indian Thinking" with some of its essential elements.

As the model shows, stories form Native American reality, where the physical and the metaphysical meet in a time continuum, and Native wisdom, with its rituals and protective traditions, is based on tribal cultures. In listening, sharing, silence and patience lies the power of stories and oral tradition, and the Circle of Life provides tribal holistic knowledge and equal sociocultural kinship. And at all times, there is the continuum of energy and spirit, transformation and synergy as well as continuous interaction between different beings and their environment.

For Fixico, "[t]he main quest for American Indians, as it has remained through the generations, is the quest for survival and balance in life" (58). In addition, Fixico reminds the reader that "[i]nstead of looking ahead, we as all people should look around us" (58). Studying our surroundings and all our relations gives us a clearer picture of our future as well. As explained earlier, both Owens and Bohm, as well as the concepts of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, call for a similar focus. The characters in Erdrich's novels

apply, although within the Ojibwe cultural context, the above-mentioned notions by Fixico, when they survive in new and changing landscapes by listening, learning and sharing and by reconstructing the old wisdom and knowledge in the present-day cycles of life. They recreate, restore and transform their lives and stories for survival and empowerment and they show what living a good life, *bimaadiziwin* (McNally, *Ojibwe Singers* 25), means for the Ojibwe.

New eras emerge in *The Birchbark House* novels, when Omakayas travels in the early novels as a child from her childhood island with wild rice fields eventually to new landscapes of buffalo in Dakota, now as a mother, forming new relationships with the surrounding nature/land and its creatures and strengthening her call as a medicine person and as a traditional storyteller. At the same time, Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series emerges as "teaching materials" for younger generations and maybe also for non-Natives, explaining and restoring the old ways in great detail from sap harvesting to medicine collecting and from hide tanning to pemmican making and other gathering and hunting duties, as discussed in chapter four.

Before looking closer at Louise Erdrich and her multicultural background as a writer, I wish to visually summarize below some of the key elements of Native dialogue or Native Ecologue that I call Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue later in this thesis.

Figures 3 and 4 visualize the process of generic Native Ecologue, based on the previously elaborated thoughts and theoretical views, incorporating, for example, Bohmian dialogue, Louis Owens's views on cross-reading, Donald Fixico's and Hartmut Lutz's notions of circles and cycles and "Indian Thinking" as well as Kronlid's and Barnhill and Gottlieb's most common features of deep ecology as far as they can be applied in general Native context. Some of the specifically Ojibwe related aspects are added to this model as Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue in chapter four and further discussed in chapter five.

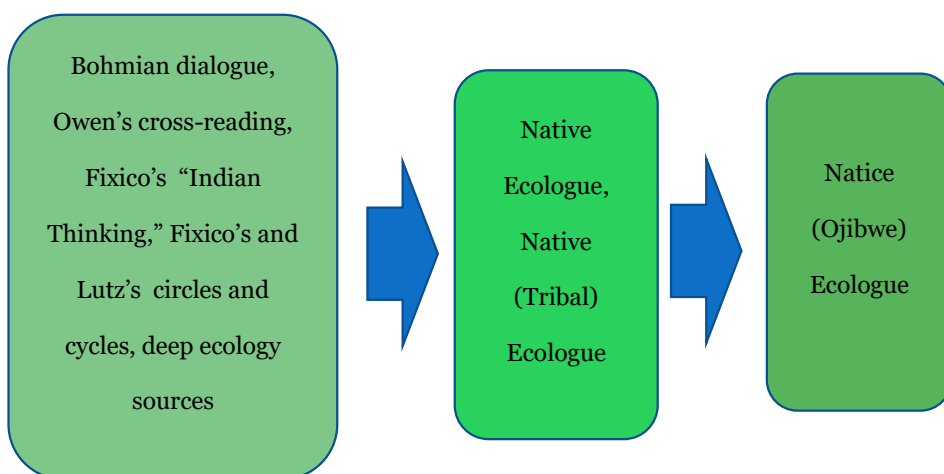


Figure 3. Summary of the development process of Native Ecologue, Native (Tribal) Ecologue and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.

The categories and points presented in this model below (Figure 4) are by no means all exhaustive, and they are also partially overlapping and interlinked and by nature fluid. However, the purpose of this model is to serve as a visual starting point for expanding and opening up the traditional (Western-focused) concept of dialogue when analyzing Native literature and Native storytelling traditions. And at all times, Native Ecologue as well as Native (Tribal) Ecologue refers to eco-based dialogue – hence the word *Ecologue*.

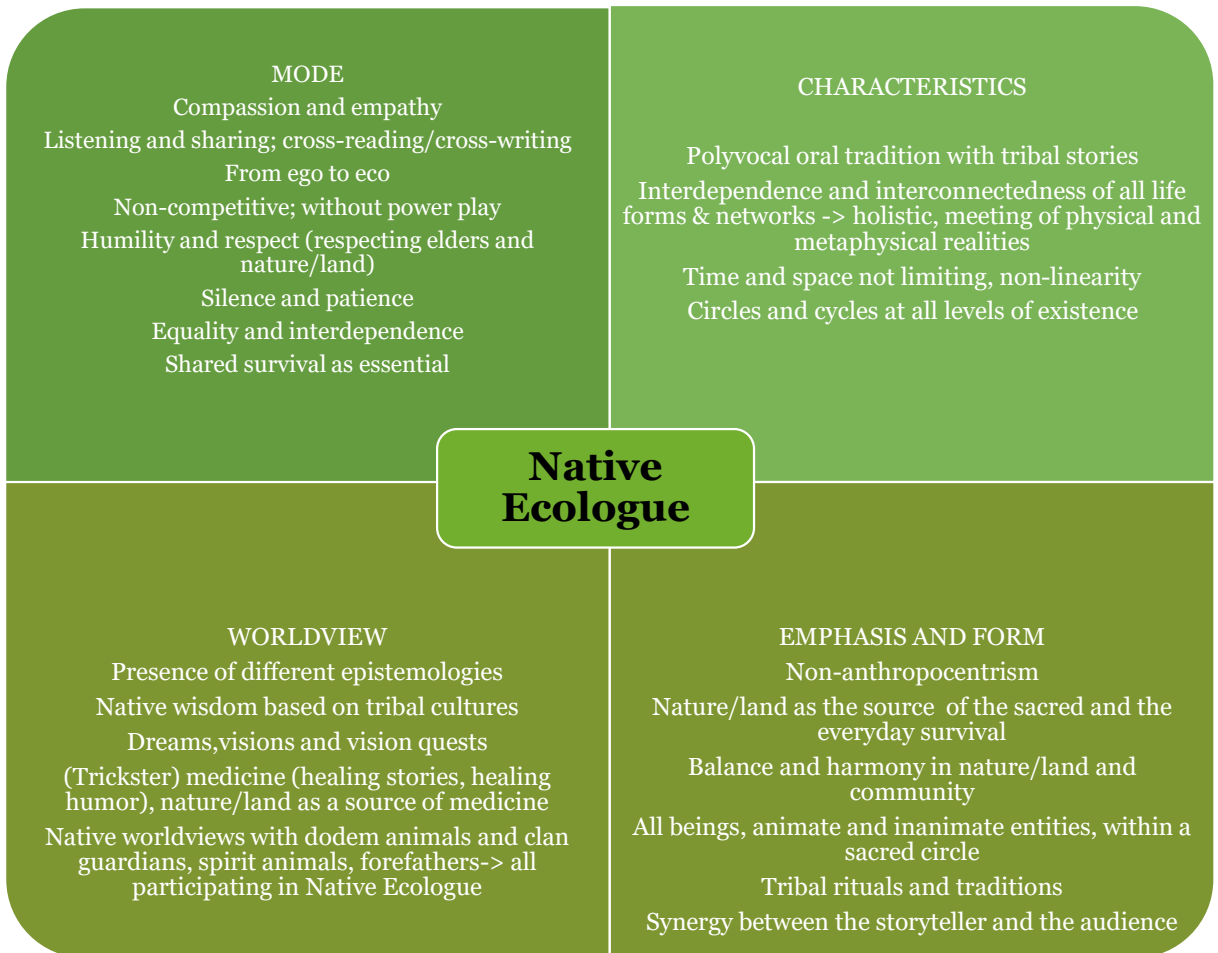


Figure 4. Summary of Native Ecologue, as applied in the analysis of traditional or more modern Native stories and narratives.

Both Native Ecologue and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue are visualized using four fluid fields, called Mode, Characteristics, Worldview and Emphasis and Form. In this model, Mode refers to the ways how Native stories are experienced and

expressed and what is their foundation. Characteristics refer to the features that Native stories might exhibit, and Worldview gives an idea what (epistemological) elements may be present in Native stories as far as different perspectives, wisdom and viewpoints are concerned. Emphasis and Form expresses the essential ways of conducting traditional but also more modern story-telling events and it also addresses the different features and aspects of sharing of Native stories in Native communities. As mentioned above, these points do not form any clear-cut categories as such but rather, they are one type of basis for an expanding story vortex where the points mentioned can only serve as starting points for larger cycles and circles of Native story analysis.

Under the above-mentioned Mode, Characteristics, Worldview and Emphasis and Form, there are listed some points that can be seen in different Native materials, both in more traditional stories and in more modern narratives. For example, under the category Mode, there are listed the following aspects: Compassion and empathy, Listening and sharing; cross-reading, From ego to eco, Non-competitive; without power play, Humility and respect (respecting elders and nature/land), Silence and patience, Equality and interdependence and Shared survival as essential. When applying these points in Native story analysis, one may notice for example that many trickster stories have some teachings related to listening and sharing as well as humility and shared survival even if these teachings are often reached by first witnessing the ego-based power play of the trickster figure or trickster's lack of silence and patience.

Similarly, when applying the category of Worldview, one may recognize how trickster stories present different tribal wisdom and how these stories have their own humorous and healing qualities that may work as medicine for the listeners. Or maybe there are several traditional Native stories of different *dodems* that represent polyvocal tribal story tradition and include different physical and metaphysical realities (Characteristics) as well as focus on *dodem* animals instead of humans and strive for establishing balance and harmony in community (Emphasis and Form). These are but simple examples of how to apply this concept of Native Ecologue. Naturally, different points are differently emphasized based on the varied Native materials that are being analyzed and not all points are relevant in all types of narratives and there might be additional points that are related to the points listed or are altogether missing from the list. As such, this visual presentation is but a starting point for further, more detailed and more culture- or nation-specific development of the concept of Native Ecologue. Since it is important to analyze Native stories in their culture-specific context, in this thesis, the general Native Ecologue is further developed into Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue where there are added such elements that are specifically true or valid in the context of Ojibwe storytelling (Figure 5).

This model as well as the additional topics earlier discussed, such as *glocality*, are applied when studying *The Birchbark House* series as a whole, as part of present-day Native American writing. This is further discussed in chapters four and five and also visualized in Figure 6.

3.3 LOUISE ERDRICH AND OJIBWE CULTURE

My first audience that I would write for [...] is American Indians, hoping that they will read, laugh, cry, really take in the work [...]. I want to be able to present Indian people as sympathetic characters, nonstereotypes, characters that any non-Indian would identify with.

Louise Erdrich in Laura Coltelli's *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak* (47-48)

Books. Why?
Because our brains hurt.
[...]
Books. Why?
To read and read while nursing a baby.
[...]
Books. Why?
Because they are wealth, sobriety, and hope.
[...]
Books. Why?
So I can talk to other humans without having to meet
them.
Fear of boredom.
So that I will never be alone.

Louise Erdrich, *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (6, 17, 99, 141;
emphasis original)

In this chapter, the focus lies on Louise Erdrich's background as a multicultural Ojibwe and her people, the Ojibwe. The reason for this is that her novels gain even greater resonance and significance to a non-Native reader if (s)he has some basic knowledge concerning the Ojibwe worldview, cultural materials and concepts. Kimberley Blaeser states the following in her interview with Jennifer Andrews: "What I try to tell my students about reading Native literature is that they have to try to enter it from the perspective of the culture from which it was written." (7). She also calls for a tribal-centered approach, when studying the Ojibwe literatures of the Great Lakes (11). While recognizing the possible cultural bias as a non-Native reader, this is the approach applied in this thesis as well.

Since my focus is on Ojibwe nature/land relationships in Erdrich's writings, I refer to some of the key elements of Ojibwe culture, as presented by Erdrich herself and other, especially Ojibwe/Ojibwe-focused scholars. While being aware of Erdrich's multicultural background, studying her *Birchbark House* novels especially as representations of Ojibwe culture and storytelling might help the reader to understand them more fully and to appreciate the several layers of her writing. In her *Birchbark House* series, Erdrich enriches our understanding of Ojibwe history and culture and even if younger readers may

see her novels more as adventure books, they are at the same time narratives that keep traditional Ojibwe storytelling, culture and way of life alive. With her stories, even if fictional, Erdrich gives face to Ojibwe history and traditions. Kate McCafferty sees Erdrich's role as that of the Ojibwe trickster Nanapush: "[...] Erdrich herself accepts for a time something like the role of Nanapush – he who brought language to the people, then instructed them in the right order of the sacred on behalf of his 'elder brothers,' the manitouk. All of them." (745). Nanapush also expresses the very core of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue in one of Erdrich's novels, namely *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. Erdrich describes the very essence of interdependence when referring to Nanapush's words on the very first page of the book.

Nindinawemaganidok

There are four layers above the earth and four layers below. Sometimes in our dreams and creations we pass through the layers, which are also space and time. In saying the word nindinawemaganidok, or my relatives, we speak of everything that has existed in time, the known and the unknown, the unseen, the obvious, all that lived before or is living now in the worlds above and below.

Nanapush

With her *Birchbark House* series, Erdrich is also tracing her own history and ancestry. She writes in *The Birchbark House*:

My mother, Rita Gourneau Erdrich, and my sister Lise Erdrich, researched our family life and found ancestors on both sides who lived on Madeline Island during the time in which this book is set. One of them was Gatay Manomin, or Old Wild Rice. I'd like to thank him and all of his descendants, my extended family. (Thanks and Acknowledgments)

Yet, at the same time, she has become known not only as a successful Native writer but also as one of the very best of American writers and regionalists. In an interview with Louise Erdrich in *The New York Times* (6th May 2016), Charles McGrath wrote:

Philip Roth said of Ms. Erdrich in an email: "She is, like Faulkner, one of the great American regionalists, bearing the dark knowledge of her place, as he did his." He added, "She is by now among the very best of American writers." ⁴⁴

Based on all the points mentioned above and Patty Loew's Preface in her *Seventh Generation Earth Ethics* (xiii), I wish to call Louise Erdrich *Ogichidaakweg*, referring to such "women warriors" or "headwomen" in the

⁴⁴ McGrath, Charles. "Louise Erdrich on Her New Novel, 'LaRose,' and the Psychic Territory of Native Americans." *The New York Times*, 6.5.2016. (www.nytimes.com/2016/05/07/books/louise-erdrich-on-her-new-novel-larose-and-the-psychic-territory-of-native-americans.html).

Ojibwe language that protect the traditional teachings of the Ojibwe and guard the past for the sake of future generations. In *The Birchbark House* series, she especially guards the female past, as explained later in greater detail.

Who are then these people who say the above-mentioned word *nindinauwemaganidok* or my relatives and mean with it all that is or has been here, above and below? In this section, I describe some features of the Ojibwe people and their culture and language and move from generic Native cultural knowledge to a more Ojibwe specific analysis. Thus, such earlier mentioned aspects as orality or circles and cycles are now studied especially in the Ojibwe context. The Ojibwe history at the time of *The Birchbark House* series is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

Before looking at the history of the Ojibwe and the meaning of different Ojibwemowin words, I wish to quote Anishinaabeg Winona LaDuke's words in Foreword (IX) to *Seventh Generation Earth Ethics: Native Voices of Wisconsin* by Patty Loew:

The land calls us. It calls us home. And it makes us the people our ancestors wish us to be. We are thunderbeings, wolves, eagles of war, feathered heroes, spirits who stand in the middle; those who fly upward, star beings, and those who shift the wind. That is who we are, our names, our clans of bear, caribou, sturgeon, and wolf. All of this ties us to this place and we know only that. We know because it comes from a land, a place whose stories we keep and tell.

[...]

We remain.

[...]

We live, as these beings. Because we are from one of the most powerful places in the world—where earth, sky, and water are a constant, underlain with spirit beings and copper, food which grows on the water, and a language which places us here and nowhere else.

Here Winona LaDuke describes how the Anishinaabeg are tied to land and stars, to stories, ancestors and all clan beings and how the Anishinaabeg are named by them. This is an Anishinaabeg view on land, place, people and nature and one answer to the question who the Anishinaabeg/Ojibwe are today. Similar interconnection and interdependence are also described by Kimberly Blaeser who mentions in an interview with Jennifer Andrews, how she sees all of her people being “linked to other people, to other stories, voices and experiences” (2).

Kate McCafferty writes that “[t]he Chippewa, central Algonquin people, [...] migrated westward to the forests of the Great Lakes region” long before the white men came (730). Today they live on reservations, in rural and urban Indian communities and as part of mainstream populations, from southern Canada to the Upper Midwest. The Chippewa, also known as Ojibway (Ojibwe) and Anishinaabeg (Anishinabe), include the Ottawa, Cree, and Salteaux people (McCafferty 730). In the language itself, the name of the Chippewa people is

actually Anishinabe and the term Chippewa is a more modern term and an older form is Ojibway. Erdrich uses both “Chippewa” and “Anishinaabe” in her writings as well as the form “Ojibwa” or “Ojibwe” in her later works, such as *The Birchbark House* series. On her bookstore webpage, she also uses the form Chippewa, as in *Turtle Mountain Chippewa*.

As later discussed, naming is an important element in Ojibwe culture. Chippewa and Ojibwe have been said to mean “drawn or puckered up,” puckering referring to the tops of the moccasins, whereas the members of this tribal group, when speaking their own language, call themselves “Anishinabe” or “the people” (Warren 36-37, Grant 83). Gerald Vizenor also mentions that the word Anishinaabeg refers to the woodland people as a familial, political, and economic unit rather than an abstract concept of nationalities (*The People Named the Chippewa* 13).

Basil H. Johnston gives his detailed description of the word “Anishinaubae” in “Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature” in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories*. He mentions how *Onishishih* means good, fine, beautiful and excellent and *naubae* refers for example to being and human species. However, to understand the term Anishinaubae more fully, one needs to first examine the stories of Nanabush, the tribe’s central and principal mythical figure who represents all men and all women (6). Erdrich herself also talks about the names of her people and the related theories in *Books and Islands* (10-11). There are many meanings and interpretations what the Ojibwe/Chippewa/Anishinaabe actually mean but for Erdrich, as a writer, the most appealing meaning is related to writing, and she sees Ojibwe people as great writers who synthesized the oral and written tradition: “The meaning that I like the best of course is Ojibwe from the verb *Ozhibii’ige*, which is ‘to write’.” (*BaI* 10-11).

Historically, when analyzing the effects of the colonization of Native American land, Seema Kurup talks about “a three-pronged attack: the tribal population was ravaged by communicable disease in the various forms of smallpox, typhoid, tuberculosis, and influenza; was assaulted culturally through language, religion, and Western customs; and was subjugated by the U.S. government with its attendant politics, bureaucracy, laws, and policies” (71). Many of the Native peoples, the Ojibwe included, faced the same concerns of the loss of land and various forceful governmental laws and policies. In the time of *The Birchbark House* series, treaties still somewhat secured the lands and the way of life of the Ojibwe in the Midwest, and “the relatively new U.S. government had only begun its aggressive push west” (Kurup 72). In this way, even if forced to move away from their ancestral lands, Omakayas and her family are not yet fully experiencing all the aspects of colonization.

In *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (2003), Louise Erdrich writes her personal interpretations of Ojibwe culture and she works on symbols and visual memory, bringing together the theme and importance of land and survival in stories, books, rocks, islands, rock paintings, offerings, naming and leaving home and traveling. For Erdrich, the rock paintings are significant – they are alive, they refer to a spiritual geography, and provide tracks for storytelling, “teaching and dream guides to generations of Anishinaabeg” (*BaI* 50). The rocks, the grandfathers, include also prints on the thunderbird as well as Nanabozho, or Winabojo. “He was wise, he was clever, he was a sexual idiot, a glutton, full of miscalculations and bravado. He gave medicines to the

Ojibwe, one of the primary being laughter.” (*BaI* 53-54). Erdrich links the oral tradition of her people – the sacred stories or *aadizookaanag* [on the dust jacket] – with the visual images found in rock paintings in Ontario and Minnesota, thus claiming that the islands of Lake of the Woods are books in themselves (*BaI* 3). Here, the oral tradition and written or visual tradition meet and survive, not only in the later novels by Ojibwe writers and the new publications with visual art included but already in the early productions of her people. There are books in the people (*BaI* 125).

Erdrich states how books are not any new invention: “Yes, I figure, books have been written around here ever since someone had the idea of biting or even writing on birchbark with a sharpened stick [...]” (*BaI* 5). Erdrich adds, how “Ojibwe people were great writers from way back and synthesized the oral and written tradition by keeping mnemonic scrolls of inscribed birchbark. The first paper, the first books.” (*BaI* 11). Referring to the expression “pressed trees,” or books, in *Tracks*, Catherine Rainwater writes how she sees Erdrich’s novels as recolonizing the colonizer. “If Nanapush’s literal strength ebbs with the disappearance of the actual trees, his storyteller’s trickster power as Erdrich’s ventriloquist increases with the use of the ‘pressed trees’ as ‘leaves’ of books.” (“Ethnic Signs in Erdrich’s *Tracks* and *The Bingo Palace*” 151). She continues how together with other Native American writers, Erdrich both records the past and shapes the future (“Ethnic Signs in Erdrich’s *Tracks* and *The Bingo Palace*” 151). In her *Birchbark House* series, Erdrich recolonizes the colonizer and reclaims the history of silent Ojibwe females, female elders included, and silent Ojibwe children by freeing their voices and by giving them the main role in her novels.

As far as the Ojibwe language goes, Erdrich describes how Ojibwemowin is an oral, communal language with many dialects, the learning of which “might be described as living a religion” (*BaI* 86-87), and she further refers to her language by saying “I thought Ojibwemowin was a language for prayers, like the solemn Latin sung at High Mass. I had no idea that most Ojibwe people on reserves in Canada, and many in Minnesota and Wisconsin, still spoke English as a second language, Ojibwemowin as their first.” (*BaI* 81). Despite Ojibwe’s position as “one of the toughest languages ever invented” (*BaI* 82), Erdrich wanted to learn it to get the jokes, prayers, sacred stories, “and most of all, Ojibwe irony” – she yearned for real communication (*BaI* 81). She tells how her partner Tobasonakwut delights in his language and loves this language of philosophy and emotions that explains especially intellectual and dream states, and how he invents new words, in spite of being once severely punished for singing a song his father taught him by a priest who drove him to a residential school (*BaI* 83-84, 87).

Kimberly Blaeser shares her view on the Ojibwe language in her interview with Jennifer Andrews. She describes how her generation often lacks the ability to speak well the Ojibwe language, and instead they use a mix of languages, combining Indian and English together. At times this has created distorted meanings of Ojibwe expressions. A mixed-up language has represented the situation and lives of many Ojibwe generations and thus, according to Blaeser, it is essential to salvage the language, “giving it a place, and reclaiming it, trying to recover it” (Andrews 6). This is what Erdrich does with her local multipurpose bookstore, Birchbark Books, in Minnesota, Minneapolis.

A stubborn attitude is needed for one's language to survive. As Owens claims, "[u]ltimately, the only way to be really heard is to make them read on our terms, though within the language of the colonizer's terminology" (*MM* 7). In case of *The Birchbark House* series, Erdrich includes glossary and uses many Ojibwemowin words throughout her novels to increase the reader's understanding of her language. For Tobasonakwut, "the beatings and humiliations only made him the fiercer in loving and preserving his language" (*BaI* 83-84). For Erdrich, the situation is different:

My experience with the language is of course very different. Instead of the language being beaten out of me, I've tried for years to acquire it. But how do I go back to a language I never had? (*BaI* 84)

According to Erdrich, Ojibwemowin, "one of the few surviving languages that evolved to the present here in North America" (*BaI* 85), is a verb-oriented language of action and human relationships and its best speakers constantly come up with new words, such as *wiindibaaanens* or computer, "little brain machine" (*BaI* 85) or *Agongosininiwag*, the chipmunk people or Scandinavian, Erdrich having no explanation for the latter (*BaI* 86). The language is deeply adapted to the land, reflecting human relationships with the spirit of the land, and its philosophy is based on and related to the lakes, forests, rivers and plains of the North, and "[i]ts origins pertain to the animals and their particular habits, to the shades of meaning in the very placement of stones" (*BaI* 85). For Erdrich, "[i]t is the language of the paintings that seem to glow from within the rocks" (*BaI* 85). Such understanding of the language as part of land and all living things, as earlier presented by both Fixico and Lutz, reflects the core ideas of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue. In *The Birchbark House* series, Ojibwe language is present throughout the novels and the audience learns Ojibwemowin expressions and also the Ojibwe point of view of chimookomanag memory tracks, as something that could not be trusted (*TGoS* 131), and Omakayas tries to teach the fragile white girl, Break-Apart Girl, about her language and culture (*TGoS* 135-137).

Gerald Vizenor also describes the nature of the visual *anishinabe* language as being one of verbal forms and word images. He writes that there is a spoken feeling to the language and it reflects "cosmic rhythms and tribal instincts, memories and dream songs," expressing different contrasts of life (*TES* 75). He adds: "[t]he *oshki anishinabe* knows what he is writing about because he sees what he is saying" (*TES* 79). The paintings on Erdrich's rocks range "[...] from a few hundred to more than a thousand years old" (*BaI* 3). These paintings are also part of cosmology – "[t]he cosmology is in the surrounding landscape, in the stars, in the shapes of the rocks and islands, and in the mazinapikiniganan, the paintings that his [her partner Tobasonakwut's] people made on the sides of the rocks" (*BaI* 34). In her *Birchbark House* series, Erdrich includes her own drawings that support her stories and give a realistic picture of Ojibwe life and history, and she also adds maps and glossaries to inform her readers about the shapes and cosmology of her stories. In this way, she includes her Native (and non-Native) audiences in her storytelling and creates visual story landscapes with her word images.

Kimberley Blaeser further talks about memory, stories, and identity. She explains how she could never be a sole source of a story; rather, her stories include all the voices, whether or not she can identify them – they are all there with their jokes, mimics and songs. She emphasizes the importance of memory: “We lived by the memory.” (Andrews 3). For her, such memory is a privilege as well as a responsibility. “I do owe something, I survived because of those stories, because of those occurrences, because of those people.” (Andrews 3). Similarly, *The Birchbark House* series is based on honoring the memory: “This book and those that will follow are an attempt to retrace my own family’s history.” (*TBH*, thanks and acknowledgements).

To understand more profoundly the fluid communication between the participants of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue and how the different beings communicate with one another also in *The Birchbark House* series, one needs to understand the worldview that characterizes Ojibwe culture. One needs to be a good listener. McCafferty (730) describes this Ojibwe worldview, explaining how the Ojibwe earth floats like an island in an endless ocean and how the eight elements, four above and four below it, create the four layers of the sky and the underworld. The underworld, however, is free from the traditional static Western notion of evil, and contains such beings as the Thunderbirds, the winds and the Great White Bear, the Great Underground Panther, the White Deer and the Horned Hairy Serpent. These different beings in the Ojibwe world, from the culture hero Nanapush and humans to the dead, “can and do transverse boundaries and planes,” even purposely seeking such travel (McCafferty 731). Referring to Theresa Smith’s work *The Island of the Anishinaabeg* (44), McCafferty takes up two essential features of the Ojibwe world, namely how all reality is experienced as personal and how the Ojibwe cosmos is multileveled by nature (731).

As mentioned by Jill Doerfler, for Anishinaabe it is important to have strong familial bonds to both honor their ancestors and plan for the seventh generation (*Those Who Belong* 91, 95). In an interview with Judith Siers-Poisson, Ojibwe writer Patty Loew, author of *Seventh Generation Earth Ethics: Native Voices of Wisconsin* (2014), states that the seventh generation is: “a concept that means, in practice, that when you sit down to make a decision, you think about how that decision is going to affect seven generations into the future [...] So, you’re thinking 240 years ahead, and it really makes a difference.”⁴⁵

Additionally, there are seven teachings (that appear with slightly different names) that are known by Anishinaabeg as the Seven Grandfather Teachings. These teachings symbolize much of what defines Minobimaadizi or Living Well, and for example Ojibwe educator and language revitalizer James Vukelich actively advocates these teachings in his social media channels, emphasizing the importance of balance in life. Also, Sandra D. Styres describes in *Pathways for Remembering and Recognizing Indigenous Thought in Education* The Gift of the Seven Grandfather Teachings (14):

⁴⁵ Siers-Poisson, Judith. “Ojibwe Author Explores ‘Seventh-Generation’ Thinking In New Book.” 15.10.2014. (www.wpr.org/ojibwe-author-explores-seventh-generation-thinking-new-book).

To cherish knowledge is to know WISDOM.
To know LOVE is to know peace.
To honour all of the Creation is to have RESPECT.
BRAVERY is to face the foe with integrity.
HONESTY in facing a situation is to be brave.
HUMILITY is to know yourself as a sacred part of the Creation.
TRUTH is to know all these things.

James Vukelich, Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, has also visualized these Seven Grandfather Teachings, the Chi/Gichi-dibaakonigewinan, in syllabics.⁴⁶

ᐱᕈᐢᐃᓂᐃᑦ Zaagi'idiwin 'Love'
 ᐸᕐᐃᑦ Debwewin 'Truth'
 ᐅᔭᙲᗵᐃᓂᐃᑦ Gwayakwaadiziwin 'Honesty'
 ᐃᓂᐱᕈᐢᐃᓂᐃᑦ Manaaji'idiwin 'Respect'
 ᐤᐱᓂᓂᓂᐃᓂᐃᑦ Dabasendizowin 'Humility'
 ᓂᓂᕈᐢᐃᑦ Zoongide'ewin 'Courage, Bravery'
 ᓂᐳᔭᐃᑦ Nibwaakaawin 'Wisdom'

⁴⁶ Vukelich, James. The Chi-dibaakonigewinan, “The Sacred Law, The 7 Grandfather Teachings” in syllabics, 8.4.2019. Shared in social media 12.4.2020. (www.facebook.com/jamesvukelichkaagegaabaw/).

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physical. These powers and aspects can be found when journeying clockwise around the circle, remembering how all things are connected and have a purpose. “This understanding brings fullness, balance, and harmony to ourselves, to self-in-relationship, to everything we do, and to everywhere we journey.” (Styres 33). In one way, Louise Erdrich summarizes the concept of Living Well in her interview with Christian A. Coleman: “What saves us is a magnificent sense of humor and a thoroughgoing respect for beauty. And also kindness. That’s number one for Native people.”⁴⁸

Also, Michael D. McNally studies in *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority and Ojibwe Religion* these teachings as well as the notion of the seventh fire. McNally talks about the Ojibwe way of life, *bimaadiziwin*. This substantive form of the verbs “move by” or “move along” refers to the idea of living well and living long in this world. It also refers to the practices of an Ojibwe way of life, to culture. (49, all emphases original). A long and healthy life free from misfortunes can only be achieved with the help and co-operation of both humans and other-than-human persons, in addition to one’s own efforts (*Honoring Elders* 50). McNally further describes in *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* the concept of *bimaadiziwin* as:

“[...] to live well in light of *bimaadiziwin* was to maintain auspicious and proper ethical and ritual relations with the sacred powers that animate *bimaadiziwin*. In this state of affairs, there was no clear distinction between the natural and the super-natural, between the material and the spiritual, or between the sacred and the ordinary. The seasonal round, as part and parcel of *bimaadiziwin*, was both a sacred and an ordinary calling. (25)

For Omakayas and her family, the daily life with the different seasons and circles and cycles is ordinary yet sacred and super-natural while being natural and everyday. McNally also mentions how the notion of the seventh fire is taking place now, when New People emerge and they seek again the help from the elders but some elders are sleeping, some are afraid and some have nothing to offer. So the elders need to awaken, too. It is time to choose between the traditional or the destructive technological path, as discussed earlier in connection with the Gaia hypothesis. If they choose right, the next fire will be that of peace and brotherhood. Also, the people with light skin need to make this choice. (*Honoring Elders* 38).

The concept of seventh generation, as mentioned by Jill Doerfler and James Vukelich, refers to the seventh-generation philosophy, where the long-term influences of all decisions are carefully considered – how my decisions are going to affect the next seven generations. As earlier mentioned, Ojibwe author Patty Loew further studies this originally Iroquois philosophy in *Seventh Generation Earth Ethics: Native Voices of Wisconsin*. Such notions are also present in the daily philosophy of South East Asia: they are part of Bhutanese culture, where the concept of Gross National Happiness, promoted by the UN, rests on the idea of focusing on the wellbeing of future generations instead of short-term economic benefits.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Coleman, Christian A. “Interview: Louise Erdrich.” *Lightspeed Magazine*, Dec. 2017 (Issue 91). (www.lightspeedmagazine.com/nonfiction/interview-louise-erdrich/).

⁴⁹ *Gross National Happiness of Bhutan*. (www.grossnationalhappiness.com/).

The Seven Grandfather Teachings mentioned above are an essential part of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue and they form the basis of the Anishinaabeg worldview. James Vukelich describes how these Seven Teachings, or The Sacred Law given in the ancient times by Gichi Manidoo, have been mediated and meditated with the sacred pipe. In Gichi-dibaakonigewinan, *akonige* refers to one who holds a wood-like article, meaning pipe stem. These Seven Grandfather teachings form the spiritual and personal foundation of the everyday Ojibwe life and they show how to interact with the entire universe. These teachings include for example compassionate and unconditional love, speaking from the heart, living correctly and properly without exalting oneself above all other relatives, respecting one another, having strength of heart and acknowledging the sanctity in others' lives.⁵⁰

When looking at *The Birchbark House* series, throughout their travels, Omakayas and her closest family respect their fellow beings, whether human or non-human, they love and care for all life and are brave and honest in their actions. They preserve the old ways of wisdom and even when meeting obstacles and hardships, they are generous, patient and humble. In all their actions, they seek balance and harmony. and maintain strength of heart. How these different aspects appear in Omakayas's and her family's connection to the land and all its creatures is further analyzed in chapter four.

All in all, when we as readers are more informed about the background and culture of Ojibwe or Anishinaabeg people, we can engage in a more perceptive and a more respectful analysis of Ojibwe stories and literature, Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series included.

4. NATURE/LAND AND NATURE/LAND RELATIONSHIPS IN *THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE* SERIES

In the previous chapters of this thesis, I have discussed Native American literary studies and Native (children's and young adult) literature and the kind of theoretical approaches that have appeared in this field over the last few decades. I have also opened up some of the ecocritical aspects relevant to Native studies focusing in particular on deep ecology and the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue as an expanded form of land- or eco-focused dialogue and a tool for analyzing Native (tribal) literature and stories. As a concept, Native (tribal) Ecologue includes nature/land dialogue with all of its life forms in all space and time dimensions, and in connection with Ojibwe culture, when analyzing Ojibwe stories, Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue includes that which is characteristic to the Ojibwe worldview.

⁵⁰ Vukelich, James. "Ojibwe Word of the Day." Gichi-dibaakonigewinan. "The 7 Grandfather Teachings, The Great or Sacred Law." Shared in social media 30.4.2020. (www.facebook.com/jamesvukelichkaagegaabaw/).

Since my research involves especially Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, I have also taken a closer look at Native literature for young adults, though *The Birchbark House* novels can be read by all audiences interested in Ojibwe storytelling and Ojibwe culture and history. As a series these novels, with multiple awards, write back to the dominant versions of the Native or Ojibwe past and add to the previously unheard voices of Ojibwe narratives. Additionally, I have studied Erdrich's role as an Ojibwe (and American) writer and a representative of her culture.

In this chapter, I apply the above-mentioned knowledge and the key features of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue (as explained below) when close reading and analyzing the five novels of *The Birchbark House* series, namely *The Birchbark House* (1999), *The Game of Silence* (2005), *The Porcupine Year* (2008), *Chickadee* (2012) and *Makoons* (2016). These novels describe moments in history when tremendous changes take place among the Ojibwe – lands are lost, culture must be adapted, and the Christian and the mainstream American influence is getting stronger. The Ojibwe are forced to change and adjust, yet they still remain connected with the land – they are defined by the land and their nature/land relationships – and their identity as Ojibwe. As earlier mentioned, the main research questions I focus on in this thesis include stories of nature/land as a teacher and a source of healing, stories of nature/land as a source of survival, challenges and happiness, and stories of change and changing landscapes.

The Birchbark House series, although fictional and not purely (auto)biographical, is based on Erdrich's family histories and transmits traditional Ojibwe values through its narrative. Louise Erdrich has mentioned in an online interview with *TeachingBooks*, "In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich" (23.10.2009), how "[i]n the Birchbark books, I'm trying to retrace the forced migration that my family and my ancestors experienced. It was a migration that my ancestors underwent. They begin at Madeline Island in Wisconsin, and they end up in the Turtle Mountains in North Dakota."⁵¹ Erdrich also continues in the same interview: "I wanted to tell the story of where my mother's people had come from. We used to visit Madeline Island frequently – that's where my ancestors lived. I loved being there; it had such resonance for me." She also mentions, how she visited Lake of the Woods in Minnesota where the next *Birchbark* books were set. "The books tracing our family tree through a series of generations – showing how they were driven from Madeline Island in Lake Superior, across Minnesota, and up past Lake of the Woods."⁵² Erdrich's great grandparents ended up in Montana when the Ojibwa were driven out onto the plains. "Then they doubled back and got land in the Turtle Mountains, which are on the plains in the very center of North Dakota up near the Canadian border. I thought this was an incredible familial journey, and I began to write it."⁵³

Erdrich's saga puts especially the young female Ojibwe Omakayas as well as the elder Nokomis, Omakayas's grandmother, in the subject position and the

⁵¹ *TeachingBooks*. "In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich." 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁵² *TeachingBooks*. "In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich." 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁵³ *TeachingBooks*. "In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich." 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

Ojibwe environment as the key setting for the story. Thus, it creates a counter-narrative for those traditional stories for younger audience where the dangerous, oftentimes male Indian is the Other, the female Indian is barely visible and the male-dominated Indian landscape is the “wild” or “uninhabited” space that must be tamed, conquered and filled with “decency” and Western civilization. In the above-mentioned interview, Erdrich states how Native people are usually depicted as strange and foreign, “with a couple of feathers sticking up. They’re always imagined as being way back in the past, and they don’t have families.”⁵⁴ For her it is important to recognize how Native peoples have a warm family structure to their lives, they have a great sense of humor and that humanity is missing in the public perception about Native American people.⁵⁵ Erdrich emphasizes how important it is that her readers do not have a simplified view of Native American people but rather realize that these people have survived. “People to this very day are speaking their language and living in their own culture and have a tremendous variety in their cultures. That’s what I wanted to do with these books.”⁵⁶ She regrets in the interview how people are not aware how Native people were pushed out of their land through a very painful means, just because someone had been forced to sign a treaty. “In time the native people were either going to be concentrated on smaller and smaller pieces of land, or they had to move ahead of the settlers. And that piece of American history is glossed over. It’s never told the way it really happened.”⁵⁷

In her writing, Erdrich anchors her sentences and expressions in the Ojibwe world and the ancestral land. As an omniscient voice she allows her readers to feel the peace and happiness that Nokomis feels when attending her beloved garden or she lets us experience the agony of Yellow Kettle, when she fears that her little son, Bizheens, might fall in the icy lake. Or the sadness that fills Quill’s heart when he has to say good-bye to his porcupine friend and protector. Throughout *The Birchbark House* series, all that takes place happens in connection with nature/land, giving the rhythm and structure to the daily life of Omakayas and her family, even in times of change. Each character in these novels is formed by their relationship to the land – this relationship is that of hope (despite all the difficulties), survival, continuation and interdependence and a sense of oneness with the surrounding land. To survive and endure, the Ojibwe need to develop a very close connection with the land and its creatures. Hence Deydey advises his daughter Omakayas to “think like a rabbit” (TPY 107).

As mentioned in the online interview with *TeachingBooks*, in her own writing Erdrich emphasizes how she tries to experience or carry out in real life those things that her characters do in her novels, even if she cannot do everything, such as hunting bears. She also addresses her *Birchbark House*

⁵⁴ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁵⁵ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁵⁶ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁵⁷ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

novels and explains how she wanted to make the books very accessible, so that especially children can easily enter her world and feel they are among a Native American family. “This family had its angers, trials, happiness, pains, heroism, desperation, and annoyances. You know, everything that anyone’s family has.”⁵⁸

Erdrich also explains about her relationship with nature and animal life and how important these are to her: “The natural world is just a part of who I am; a part of my life. [...] I have to have animals around me in order to feel that I’m living on earth. [...] I think it’s very important to realize that we’re not the only species on the earth.”⁵⁹ Erdrich and many of her family members are vegetarian and she feels this is partly so because of their close connection with the animals that live around them. “We have an instantaneous connection to animals. [...] I could see this understanding in my children, that they assumed that all insects had equal intelligence and feelings and that everything around them had some sort of intelligent life or spirit within it. There is a certain truth to this. But we lose this understanding as we grow older.”⁶⁰

4.1 ON ERDRICH’S *BIRCHBARK HOUSE* SERIES AND NATIVE (OJIBWE) ECOLOGUE

When close reading and analyzing Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* novels, from the cultural and land-focused point of view, I wish to apply the earlier mentioned aspects of ecocriticism and deep ecology and especially look into the concept of Native Ecologue as a tool for literary or story analysis but in a more nation specific form as Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, as visualized below in Figure 5. I presented the more generic view of Native Ecologue in Figure 4.

The difference between the more generic Native Ecologue and the Native people specific Ecologue lies in topics and themes that especially characterize Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue based on the traditional Ojibwe worldview and that can be seen in Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series as well. Such topics are, for example, the Ojibwe notion of Giche Manidoo, the great and kind spirit, or the Seven Grandfather Teachings (respect, love, truth/honesty, bravery/courage, wisdom, generosity and humility) and the concept of *bimaadiziwin* or “the good life” or *Minobimaadizi*, Living Well.

⁵⁸ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁵⁹ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁶⁰ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

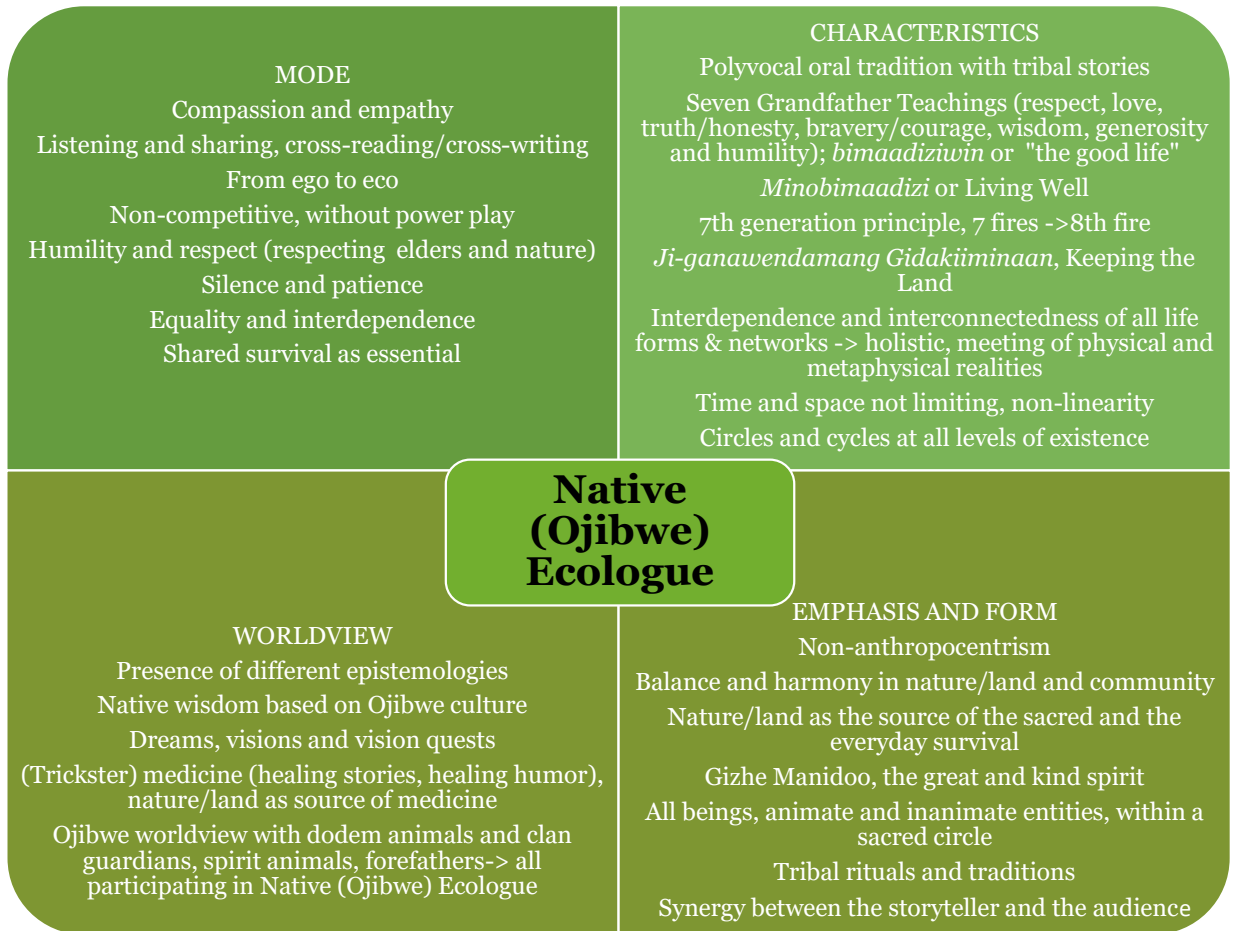


Figure 5. Native Ecologue in the context of traditional Ojibwe culture, called Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.

The notion of Living Well is also linked with the term *survivance*, as explained by Jill Doerfler in *Those Who Belong*, where she reflects upon Gerald Vizenor's thoughts on *survivance*:

Survivance is itself a form of resistance in that it provides an opportunity to challenge and critique sovereignty as it has been defined and utilized by Western nation-states. The motion and actions of sovereignty are an aspect of the comprehensive and inclusive concept of *survivance*. *Survivance* is an active word that goes beyond mere survival to include "the tease of tradition" while evading victimization. I use the term *survivance* in this work as a means to assert Anishinaabe understandings of power. (xxxiii)

Doerfler sees the notion Living Well similar to survivance, since “*mino-bimaadiziwin* is not about mere physical survival. It is a worldview in which individuals and groups actively work to create a rewarding, ethical, and nourishing life.” (*Those Who Belong* xxxiii). In addition, the Ojibwe worldview includes, according to Patty Loew, such aspects as The Seventh Generation principle, originating in Iroquois culture; *Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan* or Keeping the Land (see, for example, *Routledge Handbook of Landscape Character Assessment: Current Approaches to Characterisation and Assessment* by Fairclough et al.); and the idea of the seventh and the eventual eighth fire, giving humankind a chance to create peace in the world by taking up traditional ways instead of the destructive ways of technology (see, for example, Michael D. McNally’s *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority and Ojibwe Religion*). These specific features of Ojibwe culture are discussed later in this chapter and also in chapters five and six.

Yet, even the shared topics that fit under both Native and specifically Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue are naturally Native people specific, meaning that something that belongs under generic Native Ecologue, such as respect towards the elders and nature/land, may vary or include specific features when applied in the context of Ojibwe or, for example, Cree or Lakota cultures, as under Native (Cree) Ecologue or Native (Lakota) Ecologue. In addition, when applied in connection with the different types of Ojibwe writing, as in case of modern Ojibwe stories, the elements of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, as presented here from the viewpoint of traditional Ojibwe worldview, may differ, they may be even partially missing, differently emphasized or they may be manifested in another form. Also, if this model is applied in the context of oral storytelling, its features and characters may vary from one Native culture to another and even within the same nation.

As an example, one could look at the story of Old Tallow, “The Girl Who Lived with the Dogs,” that Nokomis describes to Omakayas as a true story, yet not magical or sacred story (TPY 170-177). This story tells about Light Moving in the Trees and how she was the only one of her family who survived the smallpox and she also rescued Omakayas as a baby. She ended up serving an evil man called Charette, who forced her to carry heavy loads and who treated her as poorly as he treated his dogs, letting her starve and freeze. This evil person called her Tallow. In their shared suffering, she became very close with Charette’s dogs, at times even forgetting that she herself was not a dog. Despite her intolerable sufferings, she never revenged her treatment but showed compassion and forgiveness. However, the dogs ended up eating their evil master. When analyzing this story applying Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, one can claim that the story about Tallow is an example of *bimaadiziwin* or “the good life” or *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well – Tallow lived according to the seven Grandfather Teachings by showing love and respect to her companions, the dogs, by being brave even when facing hardships and by being wise and generous even when she could have revenged her evil treatment. She showed compassion and empathy by saving Omakayas and by being kind to Charette’s dogs and even to Charette, tolerating much pain and agony patiently and in silence. She understood her interdependence with these dogs – only together could they survive. These are just some of the elements that one can analyze in the Ojibwe story of Tallow by applying Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue.

The overall purpose of Native (Tribal) Ecologue is to respect and give space and voice to the great variety of Native cultures and the multiple elements of their past and present land-based storytelling traditions and different genres that the traditional (Western-focused) concept of dialogue may not cover or include in all detail. At best, Native Ojibwe (or any tribal) Ecologue can offer for Native literary and story analysis an additional tool for studying and making visible the traditional and modern stories within the varied tribal cultural context. However, as a preliminary model, this concept can and should be further developed and even the fourfold table, as visualized in Figures 4 and 5, with its aspects of Mode, Characteristics, Worldview and Emphasis and Form, may just be a starting point for further discussions and concept development. At all times, the sole purpose of this concept is to serve Native literary and story analysis by being flexible and adjustable and respecting all the voices present in Native storytelling. When analyzing Native stories, both traditional and more modern ones, in their rightful cultural context, the stories can breathe and heal themselves, being freed from the Western-based tools of literary analysis.

How can we further define Erdrich's semi-autobiographical *Birchbark House* series? One can, of course, read these novels simply as fictional young adult literature but one can also see them as novels for all ages, as counter-narratives, providing much detailed information about the traditional Ojibwe lifestyle, history, culture, society and worldview, from the Ojibwe point of view, thus teaching multiple audiences. These novels give many cultural hints, such as the notion of Midewiwin tradition, that are not fully explained in the stories but that can inspire the reader to find out more about the Ojibwe world and culture, even if some themes are (right)fully understood only by an informed Ojibwe audience. Also, Omakayas, the key character, grows in these stories from a young girl to a woman, a hunter, a friend, a wife, a mother, a storyteller and a healer or a medicine woman, so one could also claim that these novels are a Bildungsroman for all ages, describing Omakayas's life and family in certain historical context of the Ojibwe or these novels can form a "medicine story" of a young Ojibwe girl and her journey to a Midewiwin and a bear healer, creatively applied by Erdrich.

The way Erdrich has structured her young adult narratives is not unique, indeed her storytelling techniques of engaging the reader are very similar throughout her productions. In all of her literature, she acutely observes the human mind with its joys and sorrows, she studies the meaning of life through small and great events, both locally and universally, giving voice to all the participants of the story, and she beautifully and in great detail describes nature/land with its seasons and moments of great solace and, at times, cruel beauty. Her tone and way of writing in *The Birchbark House* series appeals both to younger and older audiences – with her rich vocabulary of English and also Ojibwemowin expressions and by combining ancient stories with present stories she realistically and in a versatile manner describes the everyday life of the 19th century Ojibwe, both children and adults included.

In addition to Erdrich's storytelling techniques, some traditional Ojibwe cultural figures from her adult fiction reappear in her *Birchbark House* series, in the stories told by Nokomis. We meet again the cannibalistic ice monster Windigo and the humorous teacher and trickster Nanabozho (personified as Nanapush in Erdrich's other novels), although Nanabozho's sexual escapades

are here omitted. Nanabozho also appears in *Books and Islands*, where Erdrich describes how the rocks, the grandfathers, include images of the thunderbird as well as Nanabozho, or Winabojo. “He was wise, he was clever, he was a sexual idiot, a glutton, full of miscalculations and bravado. He gave medicines to the Ojibwe, one of the primary being laughter.” (*BaI* 53-54). Laughter is a healing element in *The Birchbark House* series, too, and when Omakayas’s family laughs together, the hardships of change and losing one’s homelands become less painful. For example, when Omakayas and her brother Quill play ghosts and first make everybody very worried and even angry with their disappearance, their return from a dangerous journey results in a shared and heartfelt laughter:

Nokomis was the first to laugh. It was a tentative little snort, muffled with her hand, and she had tears in her eyes, too, so the laugh was half reproachful. But that laugh was enough for Fishtail, who let out a honk of amusement. Soon everyone in camp was either crying or laughing, and although Mama continued to pretend to strike her son he only ducked under her mock blows until she fell over, laughing too, in great relief. (*TPY* 29)

The vividness of Erdrich’s characters is tangible, as mentioned by Michael D. McNally when he describes the sense of humor associated with old age and the memorable characters of Nanapush and Margaret Kashpaw in Erdrich’s *Tracks*: “Though fictional characters, I feel as though they are so true that I’ve either met them already or would recognize them on the street were I to encounter them.” (*Honoring Elders* 308). Erdrich’s illustrations, with at times also suffering or sad looking characters, give depth and a sense of realism and everyday life to her *Birchbark House* series. Erdrich describes her drawings in an online interview with *TeachingBooks*:

It’s not research. It’s just life. It’s just the way the drawings come out of photographs or the way I place an object into a story. There’s a chapter called “Hunger,” and it includes a little makak—a birchbark eating bowl. I had that bowl, so I drew it. I try to draw and do things from life and draw things from life just the way my characters would.⁶¹

Erdrich continues in the same interview, how she started writing *The Birchbark House* series when she was on Madeline Island, Wisconsin, “drawing illustrations of stones and crayfish. There are all sorts of little things in the books that are drawn from things that I picked up on the island.”⁶² She mentions how she learned to draw from her mother and for *The Birchbark House* books she decided to draw herself instead of using an artist, since many things in the books needed to be drawn from life or using real Ojibwa objects. Erdrich explains: “So almost everything that’s in the books is taken from around my house, or it’s drawn from photographs of my own children (I have four daughters and plenty of lively nephews). So they’re very personal

⁶¹ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁶² *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

drawings.”⁶³ For example, Andeg, the crow that appears in *The Birchbark House*, Erdrich drew from life, that bird being their pet crow. “The crow used to sit with me while I wrote, so we became very close friends, and I was able to write about and draw the crow for the book.”⁶⁴

Dreese mentions in *Ecocriticism*, how in American Indian literatures of today the vivid and haunting stories, such as Erdrich’s, and oral myths that combine history with the present create rich and often complex literatures – no longer can we see boundaries between the past and the present or the physical and spiritual or history and myth (23). This is very true also in *The Birchbark House* stories. Erdrich actively engages her readers, pulling them together into the swirling rivers or stormy lake shores or letting them rest under the beautiful night stars, as in *The Game of Silence*: “They all lay down under the stars. There were no mosquitoes or flies when the air was so chilly. Yet the warmth from underneath kept them comfortable.” (72). However, these realistic stories by Erdrich are no stranger to the sufferings experienced by the Ojibwe – there is hard work, hunger, sickness, death and loss as well as imminent danger constantly present in all of her *Birchbark House* novels. “In a bony, hungry, anxious group, the people from the boats waded ashore. They looked at the ground, fearfully and in shame.” (*TGoS* 1).

Dreese continues, how tribal stories connect people with their land and past landscapes, their cultural identity and history – a mythic reterritorialization takes place with rewritten past stories and places and restored sense of place and self (23). Also, as Bradford describes, Omakayas learns to adapt when living between European and Anishinabe cultures, between tradition and colonialism, and she is maintained and sustained by her Anishinabe culture even when familiar patterns are disrupted (143-144). When such safe patterns with familiar daily rhythm are taken away, the structure of *The Birchbark House* stories also becomes more unpredictable and the chapters no longer follow the traditional cyclical patterns – it is time for Omakayas and her family to attempt to find normality and harmony once again, now in new surroundings.

Another term connected with American Indian literature, in addition to reterritorialization, is the notion of “homing in,” by William Bevis. David Stirrup refers to this notion in *Louise Erdrich*. “Coming from a particular place, family, community, and tribe, Erdrich is also, in a sense, tracing a return to that group.” (Stirrup 182, emphasis original). Stewart describes this in her chapter as a process where the protagonist successfully “homes in” when he or she reconnects with his or her tribal legacy with the people, the place, the rituals and the history (“Alive and Well” 57). This point resonates well with Scott Momaday’s protagonist Abel in *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) and her protagonist Tayo, but it is also present in Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series with Omakayas. Omakayas is not distant physically or emotionally from her Ojibwe legacy but she needs to reconnect with the past healing and storytelling power of her family to take her

⁶³ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁶⁴ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

rightful place as a future healer and storyteller of her people. She also needs to come to terms with her new home, the Great Plains, and her own past. Erdrich's Ojibwe readers, too, "home in" with their tribal legacy via her stories, as does Erdrich herself.

In the first book, *The Birchbark House*, which was a finalist for a National Book Award, Omakayas's family still continues their life as before in 1847, even though white people increasingly intrude upon their tribal lands – Omakayas's family harvests the wild rice, they build their birchbark house for summer and cedar house for winter and collect the spring sap from the trees. They hunt and gather as they have always done, and there is still time for playing (and fighting) with her little brother Pinch, care for the tiniest baby Neewo, imitate her big sister Angeline, and learn from the powerful and mysterious Old Tallow, a strong, independent Ojibwe woman who is very fond of Omakayas. But before Omakayas realizes, things change radically, and in the midst of great suffering from winter sickness, a smallpox epidemic, she realizes her role and calling as a healer, continuing her family tradition from her beloved grandmother Nokomis. In this novel, the threat of white settlers is not yet a major threat, and Erdrich can, for now, focus on describing a relatively independent Ojibwa community on the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker (Madeline Island) in Southern Lake Superior.

Louise Erdrich describes the story behind her first novel in her online interview with *TeachingBooks*. It started as a story that she told her daughters:

I told them about this girl who had been left alone on an island and how she survived and about how she was rescued by an old woman.

As I began to do research, I found a depiction of this woman who actually did hunt for bear with a spear and who was an Ojibwa woman. She was well over six feet tall. She had a tattered and dramatic looking coat that she wore. And she had a pack of dogs.

I had this experience in the writing of the book that was very peculiar. I would be drawn into research, but I would find in the research a corroboration of what I'd already written. So I would keep going back and forth between research and the present and the past. It all came together for me in a wonderful way.⁶⁵

Erdrich also describes in detail how she used for *The Birchbark House* a very old name Omakayas, found on a tribal roll. However, "the real true way to say 'little frog' in Ojibwa is 'Omakakeens.' Either there was a dialect that had been lost where Omakayas would be the way to say little frog, or the person who was non-Ojibwa speaking who wrote the name down wrong." Erdrich still wanted to use the old spelling for her novel.⁶⁶

In the second book, *The Game of Silence*, which also has received multiple awards, two years have passed and the smallpox winter of 1847 is over and life seems again, for a time being, to find its natural rhythm of wild rice harvesting,

⁶⁵ *TeachingBooks*. "In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich." 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁶⁶ *TeachingBooks*. "In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich." 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

building birchbark house in summer and putting up the strong-scented cedar log cabin for winter before the first snow reaches the town of LaPointe. But peace after the battle with disease is short-lived and the family must leave their island due to the encroachment of white people and move further west – the Ojibwa community is now under direct attack from the U.S. government and through dispossession of their lands the traumatic consequences of colonization are felt. Invalidating a previous treaty, the government orders the Ojibwe to move westwards into the land of the Lakota and Dakota.

In *The Game of Silence*, when Fishtail describes the troubled situation between the chimookomanag (whites) and the leaders of the Ojibwe, Erdrich refers to the infamous Sandy Lake tragedy of 1850. Seema Kurup describes how Erdrich refers to an actual event so that the reader can imagine the tragic incidents that the Ojibwe faced in the mid-nineteenth century in the Ojibwe's historical fight for survival: "In a scheme to trap the Ojibwe west of the Mississippi, making their removal west easier on the U.S. government, officials forced the Ojibwe to collect their 1850 annuity payment at Sandy Lake, Minnesota." (82). 3,000 Ojibwe traveled late autumn 500 miles only to realize there were no payments and no provisions at Sandy Lake. 12% of the tribe died, 400 men, women and children (Kurup 82). Such forced migration may well end in a battle of survival between the tribes. Disease has taken many loved ones from Omakayas but now her family risks losing even more, their home and their way of life. Li-ping Chang considers that Erdrich's title, *The Game of Silence*, has at least five meanings: "(1) silence as a kind of child's game; (2) the silence of the Ojibwa people who are compelled to move west; (3) the fearful silence of the Ojibwa people as they enter the territory of their enemy, the Bwaanag [Dakota Sioux], in a game of life and death; (4) the lack of any alternative but to remain silent as the Ojibwa people endure the loss of their land during the colonial period; (5) the silencing and marginalization of Native American history, a history that must not be forgotten" ("(Re)location of Home in Louise Erdrich's *The Game of Silence*" 134). With her *Birchbark House* series, Erdrich also changes the game of silence by now giving voice to all those kept silent for too long.

Erdrich herself has described her second novel and its game of silence in the following manner in the previously mentioned interview with *TeachingBooks* (23.10.2009):

I always loved this game that I played with my children. It is an old Ojibwa game that I think a lot of people play to this day. It's a cross-cultural parent's way of keeping your children quiet wherever you're going. You play how long can you stay quiet? And the one who wins gets a prize.

I used to play it with them when I needed them to be really quiet. When Ojibwa parents needed to discuss something serious, they would put out a pile of gifts and the children would be able to choose from them as long as they maintained perfect silence while the adults discussed the business they had to attend to. This is something they had to evolve during long winters in the small quarters of their birchbark lodges.

I thought this was a great title and a great game. I also wanted to use the game and its name, which has a certain menace to it, to describe how my

little family was going to have to move on into a world where they would be more threatened as they left their home on the island.⁶⁷

The third and also awarded book, *The Porcupine Year*, is set in 1852, when Omakayas, Little Frog, is now 12 years old and, as stated in the dustjacket of *The Porcupine Year*, Omakayas and her family set off on a harrowing journey in search of a new home, and they travel with canoes from Lake Superior along the rivers of northern Minnesota searching for another landscape to call home. No longer does the book follow any traditional, cyclical, and seasonal pattern in chapters as in the two previous novels, where the rhythm of life was still created by the safe island life. Now the safe rhythm is disrupted and broken, and they stay on the shores of a lake and face many troubles and hardships, enemies and unknown dangers. *The Porcupine Year* is very much about the emotional, physical, and psychological traumas of colonization faced by the Ojibwe children and youth in a time when the Ojibwe become refugees in their own land. Seema Kurup describes, how “[i]n many of Erdrich’s novels, particularly the children’s books, warring tribes often disrupt idyllic tribal life, so that a picture of the complex social relations among tribes is offered rather than a facile, one-dimensional portrait of Native American life.” (86). At the same time, however, Omakayas keeps learning about nature, the land, the spirits and all that is important and gives a sense of continuation in the midst of all change. Her family, as well as Erdrich’s novel structure, adjusts and survives.

In connection with this novel, Erdrich describes how she uses information from different historical sources, such as from trappers’ journals, history books, and oral history. “There is an oral history that recounts rescuing settlers’ children. I was told about this by an Ojibwa elder, who shared that the children had been adopted and lived with an Ojibwa family for some time. So, I used that story within *The Porcupine Year*.”⁶⁸ Erdrich also mentions, how she uses a different animal for each of her novels.⁶⁹ For example these animals are presented in her novels: *The Birchbark House* presents Andeg, the Crow; *The Game of Silence* introduces Omakayas’s dog Makataywazi, *The Porcupine Year* has Quill’s porcupine as a key character, *Chickadee* is dedicated to chickadee and *Makoons* means Little Bear, the Bear Child who is very skillful with horses and catching buffalo.

The fourth book, *Chickadee*, winner of the 2013 Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction, is set in 1866. Omakayas now has children of her own, the inseparable twins Chickadee and Makoons, who are tragically parted when Chickadee is kidnapped by Zhigaag’s sons. To be united once again as a family, Chickadee must show how small things, like his namesake, have great power. They must all bear the merciless travels to the Great Plains of Dakota Territory and to learn a new way of life with horses and oxcarts to survive the harsh yet beautiful Plains as buffalo hunters. As Kurup points out, “While *The Game of Silence* and *The Porcupine Year* illustrate the difficulties of migration into

⁶⁷ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁶⁸ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁶⁹ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

Dakota Sioux territory, *Chickadee* finds the family confronted with the Métis and American settlers on the plains.” (87). Kurup also claims that in *Chickadee* the themes of racism and religious pressures are introduced (87). Here also the nature-based traditional lifestyle is slowly changing and gives way to towns with new and more all-American environments emerging.

In her most recent novel, *Makoons*, Little Bear, the twin brother of Chickadee, who is still an 8-year-old as in the previous novel, lives a new life with his family now on the Dakota Plains, away from the reservations, and in his vision, he has seen that they will never return to their homelands east to the lake and the woods. Instead, he sees more challenges are to come for his family in the future. These he will not reveal even to his twin brother. The novel ends in an open-ended manner, indicating that Erdrich will publish more sequels to her series. In the online interview with *TeachingBooks*, Erdrich mentions that *The Birchbark House* series will eventually include eight novels.⁷⁰ In another interview, “Five Questions for Louise Erdrich,” with Martha V. Parravano, Erdrich describes her then upcoming novel *Makoons* as a very personal book, since she will be writing it from the living memory of her relatives: “I was fortunate enough as a child to remember my great-grandfather, The Kingfisher, who lived into his nineties and had been part of some of the last buffalo hunts along the Milk River in Montana. So what I will be describing has incredible resonance for me.”⁷¹

As can be seen from the above-mentioned interviews, *The Birchbark House* novels are highly personal to Erdrich and they reflect her love for nature/land, Native American family and Ojibwe storytelling, history (or herstory) and culture. In the following subchapters of this thesis, I will close read these five novels, especially from the cultural point of view, and look at nature/land and nature/land relationships. These themes overlap and intertwine in the novels, in circles and cycles, and hence creating separate headings is not intended to suggest division but emphasis. These novels are not simply chronological works but provide overlapping and interlinked stories that like the heroine Omakayas, Little Frog, freely jump in time and place. Similarly, in my analysis, instead of using a typically Western linear approach, I prefer to address the topics of my interest in circles and cycles, looking at them from different angles and returning to them as needed.

4.2 STORIES OF NATURE/LAND AS A TEACHER AND A SOURCE OF HEALING

Nature/land has a role as a teacher and a healer throughout *The Birchbark House* series, as in other Erdrich’s novels, and in this section of the thesis I look into these aspects of Erdrich’s writing in greater detail. In *Understanding Erdrich* (76), Seema Kurup writes how in *The Birchbark House* series such values as respect for nature are foregrounded and the land is seen as sacred, something that is to be cared for and protected, not stripped and tamed. To

⁷⁰ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁷¹ Parravano, Martha V. “Five Questions for Louise Erdrich.” The Horn Book Inc. 12.9.2012. (www.hbook.com/?detailStory=five-questions-for-louise-erdrich).

somehow abuse the land and take advantage of nature is unthinkable. Omakayas and her family live a gratitude-filled life in nature, on their Native lands.

What are then the teachings and elements of healing that the land provides in these novels? How is the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue visible here? In the following subchapters, I will discuss how the main elements of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, such as humbleness, compassion, empathy, listening and sharing as well as the traditional Ojibwe worldview with its wisdom and traditions, such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings, become visible in Erdrich's stories and how Omakayas and her family learns by stories and by dreams and visions that promote both teaching/learning and healing. These novels also show in different ways what *bimaadiziwin* or "the good life," *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well and *Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan* or Keeping the Land means in practice or how the cultural Anishinaabeg tradition of *Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan* (Keeping the Land) is expressed through three practices, namely *akiing ondaaji'idizowin* (land-based livelihood practices), *akiwi-gikendamowining* (land-based knowledge) and *aadizokewin* (telling of legends and teachings). These concepts materialize in the everyday land-based lifestyle, when Omakayas and her family live from the land and keep the story tradition and ancient wisdom alive, as expressed in the following subchapters and concluded in chapter 4.2.8.

The circle of an Ojibwe year, with months named according to natural events, gives a daily rhythm to Omakayas and her family whose lives are never separate from the land. Seasons bring Omakayas to different landscapes for rice harvesting, canoe making or birchbark house building. And in winter she listens to the stories of the land and learns more about her path from Nokomis or gets to know the wisdom and healing humor provided by trickster stories. She learns not to give up seeing how even the smallest creatures of the land, such as chickadees, have a great power and are important to the Ojibwe. She also understands that there are other beings, such as the small people, who are helpful and need to be respected. Omakayas gets to know creation stories that link the Ojibwe to ancient times and she hears animal stories that carry the wisdom of Seven Grandfather Teachings (respect, love, truth/honesty, bravery/courage, wisdom, generosity and humility) or *bimaadiziwin*, "the good life" or *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well. She also understands the importance of naming and how these different names reflect the Ojibwe land and nature, with all its beings. In her daily chores, when wandering in changing Ojibwe landscapes, Omakayas learns the art of healing from Nokomis and understands the importance of respecting forefathers and manitous and offering for example tobacco. She becomes familiar with the old ways, with different healing herbs and natural cures and gets to know the secrets of dreams and visions and vision quests. She also learns to respect the Great Kind Spirit and accepts her future role as a healer with a powerful bear medicine. I shall next describe these teachings in more detail.

4.2.1 ABOUT OJIBWE STORYTELLING TRADITIONS

The notion of circles and cycles as well as seasons and nature/land are of great importance in Ojibwe storytelling tradition. In the first novel, *The Birchbark House*, the reader experiences the full circle of an Ojibwe year, from Neebin (summer) to Dagwaging (fall) through to Biboon (winter) and Zeegwun (spring). Seasons create a frame for Erdrich's story, and months have names based on the most important aspects of the season, such as the month of picking heartberries (*TBH* 46), the month of picking blueberries (*TBH* 47) or winter time when there was scarcity of food in little spirit moon (*TBH* 83) or when they feared the Crust on the Snow Moon, with lack of meat, too thick ice, diseases and the stalking windigo spirits, the Hungry Ones (*TBH* 101).

Traditional Ojibwe stories were adjusted according to season. Nokomis would tell her special adisokaan (or aadizookaan, *TGoS* 158) stories of teaching in winter, during those long winter nights when even the last frog was safely sleeping in the ground, whereas Omakayas's father Deydey, Mikwam, who was half white and half Ojibwe, a member of the catfish clan, the Awausesee, would share his travel stories and scary ghost stories at other times, too (*TBH* 61, 79). The reason for telling special stories only in winter is given: "But she (Omakayas) knew that if underground and underwater creatures hear the stories, they might repeat them to the powerful underwater spirits, or the great spirits of the animals, who might be angry at the Ojibwe for talking about them." (*TPY* 37-38). In *Chippewa Customs*, Frances Densmore mentions, how "[t]he winter was the time for storytelling, and many old women were experts in this art." (29). When times are hard and there is sorrow in the family, Nokomis tells stories to heal them, to keep up their spirits, and to make them laugh again (*TPY* 122). After Nokomis herself has passed away and the family misses her stories, one day Omakayas says these words: "Mewinzha, mewinzha, a long time ago." (*M* 133). She is now ready to take on Nokomis's role as storyteller.

Storytelling, healing and the notion of Ojibwe clans are interlinked. Lisa Mosher (Odawa) describes in *In the Words of the Elders*, how for Ojibwe people for example the Bear Clan members are healers, who protect the community and the people and it is the bear that does the healing (155). The Ojibwe clan members, like Deydey above, have their own dodem animals, and in her *Books and Islands*, Erdrich talks about her ancestors of both Ajijauk or Crane dodem and the Makwa or Bear dodem that lived there generations ago, having moved from Madeline Island in Lake Superior all the way to the Turtle Mountains in present-day North Dakota (*BaI* 80), like Omakayas's family in *The Birchbark House* series. Erdrich imagines how her ancestors, Baupayakiingikwe, Striped Earth Woman, and Kwasenchiwin, Acts Like a Boy, "walked where I walked, saw what I've seen, perhaps traced these rock paintings. Perhaps even painted them." (*BaI* 80-81).

In her book on Chippewa customs, Densmore also writes about the totemic system and describes how "[t]he word *totem* is irregularly derived from the term *ototeman* of the Chippewa and cognate Algonquian dialects" (9). She further tells how blood-related groups "were designated by the name of an animal which, in common usage, came to be called their 'dodem animal'" (9)

and she also refers to twenty-one clans, including for example pike, eagle, moose and black duck, and six principal families, namely those of the crane, catfish, bear, marten, wolf, and loon, that comprised eight-tenths of the whole tribe (10). The bear and marten were considered “most aristocratic” of the animal clans, like the crane and eagle among the bird clans (Densmore 10). In *The World We Used to Live In*, Vine Deloria Jr. provides a pan-tribal presentation of Native spirituality and the power of medicine men. He writes: “[O]ur ancestors invoked the assistance of higher spiritual entities to solve pressing practical problems, such as finding game, making predictions of the future, learning about medicines, participating in healings, conversing with other creatures [...]” (xix). He further explains how these higher spirits could control the winds, the clouds, the mountains, the thunders and all phenomena of the natural world (xix). Unfortunately, as Vine Deloria Jr. points out, many accounts and stories of spiritual powers have been lost, because for non-Indians they have often been nothing more than fables to entertain children or scare them into behaving (xx). In her novels, Erdrich reminds her readers of all ages, Native (and non-Native), of such traditional Ojibwe worldviews and stories that are worth remembering.

In *The Birchbark House* series, stories form the backbone of all the novels and they are intertwined and connected with nature/land and all its beings and phenomena – stories are told about nature/land, in nature/land and with nature/land. For Omakayas, there is nothing better than to stay comfortably under her warm rabbit-skin blanket, when the winter wind howls outside, and listen when Nokomis tells her funny and wonderful stories about how the world and its people came into being and how the hilarious and absurd yet wise teacher Nanabozho, Omakayas’s favorite, taught so much for her people or how the terrible ice and snow monster, the wiindigoo, harassed the people and how the smallest of girls, such as Omakayas, could defeat that monster (*TGoS* 158-165). One of the familiar Nanabozho stories is the story of Nanabozho and the buffalo and how Nanabozho, in his greediness for fat buffalo meat, cut his own fighting arms and could not outsmart the buffalo (*TPY* 130-131). “Enjoy my delicious smell, that is all you will get [...]” (*TPY* 131).

In *Chippewa Customs* (97), Densmore analyzes Chippewa stories and legends and divides them into three classes. In addition to the stories that were told to amuse children, the Chippewa tell stories (1) about the “first earth and its inhabitants,” (2) stories about Winabojo, or Nanabush, and (3) “fairy stories” that were partially based on white men’s stories, but adapted so that Native people could comprehend them. The stories about the first earth told about the creation of the world and how it was carried from beneath the water in the paw of a small animal, and the stories about the master of life, the great teacher Nanabush were told and retold by the elderly around the winter fire – Nanabush was known for his humor and healing skills as well as his power to defeat even death. Concerning the Chippewa fairy tales, Densmore claims that they could contain elements of biblical teachings, castles and treasures of European fairy stories and travelers’ tales mixed with current history (106). Stories related to first earth were especially sacred and important. Basil H. Johnston writes in “Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature,” how in the Anishinaubae oral tradition the tribe’s story of creation precedes all other

stories in the natural order, since creation stories worldwide provide insights into human nature (6).

Erdrich includes different Ojibwe stories in her *Birchbark House* series. These stories within stories, however, only appear in the first three novels, *The Birchbark House*, *The Game of Silence* and *The Porcupine Year*. When life changes for Omakayas and her family, so does the structure of stories in the novels: the peaceful life with seasonal cycles and traditional storytelling moments is interrupted and replaced with shorter chapters and a more hectic pace of life in new, harsher landscapes.

In addition to the categories mentioned by Densmore, the following stories can be found in *The Birchbark House* series:

- 1) Creation stories: "Nanabozho and Muskrat Make an Earth" (*TBH* 172)
- 2) Trickster stories of Nanabush/Nanabozho: "Nanabozho and the Buffalo" (*TPY* 130)
- 3) Windigo stories: "The Little Girl and the Wiindigoo" (*TGoS* 159)
- 4) Stories about Ojibwe wisdom and cultural traditions by Nokomis (the stories of the old times, the "aadizookaanag"): "The Little Person" (*TGoS* 103), "The Bear Girl Makoons" (*TPY* 122)
- 5) Life stories by Nokomis and Old Tallow: "Grandma's Story: Fishing the Dark Side of the Lake" (*TBH* 134), "Old Tallow's Story" (*TPY* 82), "The Girl who Lived with the Dogs" (*TPY* 170)
- 6) Stories for entertainment: "Deydey's Ghost Story" (*TBH* 61)

With these stories, mostly told in winter, Erdrich links her *Birchbark House* saga with the Ojibwe storytelling tradition of circles and cycles. All these stories serve as teachings to Omakayas and rest of the family. Yet, at times, even the stories do not seem to be enough to heal the disease and its effects the white bring to the Ojibwe. After losing her little brother Neewo to smallpox, Omakayas finds no solace even in the Nanabozho trickster stories shared by Nokomis – she cannot "find in the stories the will to go forward" (*TBH* 159), no voices, no dreams help her, only time, strong rabbit soup by her beloved Old Tallow and the rays of the bright winter sun finally heal her (*TBH* 160). The only good thing about winter was stories, and when the flames jump on the cabin walls, Nokomis tells her family about manitous, windigos and Nanabozho, Omakayas's favorite. One of the most important stories, a creation story, is the one of the diving muskrat, how the earth began (*TBH* 171). Jill Doerfler describes that same story in *Those Who Belong*:

Finally, Zhaashkoonh (the lowly muskrat) offered to try. The animals did not think that Zhaashkoonh would be successful. Zhaashkoonh gathered all her/his strength and courage and dove down. When Zhaashkoonh floated to the top the animals thought that all hope was lost. Nanaboozhoo opened Zhaashkoonh's front paw and found a grain of earth. He found more in Zhaashkoonh's other paws and mouth. Nanaboozhoo then blew on Zhaashkoonh and life returned. Nanaboozhoo took the grains of earth in the palm of his hand and then threw it around onto the water. An island was created. (93)

For Nokomis the most important teaching of such creation story is this: “If such a small animal could do so much [...], your efforts are important too.” (*TBH* 175). This is also discussed by Turtle Mountain Ojibwe James Vukelich in his online teaching on “Ojibwe Word of the Day,” where he mentions how the Ojibwe spiritual uncle trickster Nanabozho recreated the earth on the turtle’s back by gathering little *aki* or earth from the muskrat’s paw.⁷²

Another such small animal is Andeg, the crow, who does his part too by keeping away the mice and even finding squirrel hollows with nuts and seeds to feed the family (*TBH* 175-176). As Densmore (97) points out, the Chippewa creation stories contain the element of a small animal doing great things and having an important role in the creation of the world, and similarly, throughout her *Birchbark House* novels, Erdrich emphasizes the importance of small things. In *Chickadee*, Nokomis chastises Chickadee for not respecting the tiny bird – “small things have great power” (27), and Erdrich herself writes: “I tell myself that God and meaning are in the small things as well as in the vast.” (*BaI* 7).

There are also small people who are known to be powerful and helpful. When Omakayas and Nokomis are collecting medicines in the forest, feeling winter chill already in the air, Nokomis shares with Omakayas the story she loves, the one of the little people, the memegwesiwag, who are Nokomis’s helpers and provided her starving people with a bear at the time of the year when these helpers also collected their own medicines for winter. The reason for sharing this story now is to encourage Omakayas to search for her own spirit helpers (*TGoS* 102-110). In Native language dictionary, the memegwesi, also spelled Memegwesiwak (*memii* meaning “hairy” in Ojibwe), are described as small, child-sized riverbank-dwelling water spirits that are hairy and have a large head. They are mainly seen by medicine people and children and they may also help humans who give them tobacco and other gifts.⁷³

In all the stories shared by Nokomis, there is both teaching and a deeper meaning. One such story is that of “The Bear Girl Makoons,” where a bear girl with many powers is treated badly by her older sisters because of her looks. Nevertheless, she loves, cares and protects her sisters even against bad medicine, saves them from death and arranges their happy marriages. After she releases the sun and the moon captured by the bad medicine woman, she marries the youngest son of the chief as a gift but this young man dislikes Makoons, since she looks like a bear, and wants to get rid of her. Makoons’s handsome husband even throws her in the fire, where she turns into a beautiful maiden. After finding out the true character of her husband, Makoons leaves and returns home (*TPY* 122-128).

This story makes Omakayas think about her bear spirit and remember her bear healer’s calling of not punishing wrongdoers with bad medicine but rather bringing light and kindness to people, while maintaining one’s integrity and respecting one’s culture. As later described in greater detail, Michael Pomedli mentions in *Living with Animals: Ojibwe Spirit Powers* how bears,

⁷² Vukelich, James. “Ojibwe Word of the Day.” Aki. ‘Earth, land, ground.’ Shared in social media 25.4.2020. (www.facebook.com/jamesvukelichkaagegaabaw/).

⁷³ “Legendary Native American Figures: Memegwesi (Mannegishi).” (www.native-languages.org/memegwesi.htm).

as a link between humans and the Great Spirit, knew medicines well and could give humans healing powers (121-122).

Native people learn many things by sharing stories, and for the younger ones, there are also games that teach them important qualities of survival. One of such games is the snow snake game played in winter (*TGoS* 167), mainly for fun and competition. In *Chippewa Customs*, Densmore refers to this game and describes how the size of the snow snake which was skillfully thrown depended on the age of the child or young man and how the handles of these snow snakes were personally decorated (68). Another prominent game in Ojibwe culture is the game of silence, which is played three times in the second novel, *The Game of Silence*. As mentioned earlier, such a game is played when the grown-ups need to discuss important and urgent matters, to have a council and yet keep an eye on the children and young and also keep them silent. The one who can keep silent longest will win one of the treasures brought by the visitors, such as clay marbles, maple sugar, dolls or bows and arrows (*TGoS* 17-18). All the above-mentioned stories and games helped the Ojibwe children and youth learn about their culture and also have some fun, especially in times of great change and many challenges.

4.2.2 ABOUT OJIBWE NAMING TRADITIONS

The first of the novels, *The Birchbark House*, starts with these words: “She was named Omakayas, or Little Frog, because her first step was a hop. (5). Later, this same Omakayas, now a mother, skips when chasing her twin sons (*C* xi). Naming is an important matter for the Ojibwe. In *The Everlasting Sky*, Gerald Vizenor describes how many tribal names have been invented or changed and translated without meaning. He talks about the sacred, spiritual names, known from a dream or vision and given to children by a close family member. “The actual *anishinabe* sacred names were not revealed to strangers and were seldom translated.” (12). Kimberly Blaeser also refers to the importance of naming and community participation in her interview with Jennifer Andrews. She explains how Native people can have many names, your name can change throughout your life, and in many tribes you may not disclose your Indian name (5). In *The Birchbark House*, Erdrich explains how Omakayas’s smallest brother is called Neewo, which meant the fourth, but for the spirit to stay amongst the living, he should be given a name, so he does not decide to go back to the other place (37). Only eight people on the island have the right to name babies, Nokomis is one of them. None of these eight have yet dreamed a name for little Neewo. So secretly, Omakayas decides it is her job to name her little brother, maybe with one of the bird names he so likes (*TBH* 39, 40). And so she does and calls little Neewo Chickadee (*TBH* 42).

Frances Densmore describes naming in detail in *Chippewa Customs* from the ethnographical point of view. Chippewa names belong to six different categories. A dream name was ceremonially given by a namer, an individual could acquire a dream name and a namesake name was given by one’s parents. A name could also be a common name or nickname or it could be a name of gens or a euphonious name without any significance. The ceremonial dream name received, for example, in childhood could not be given to anyone else,

and at times a dream name was acquired in solitary fast and isolation, especially in puberty. Such a name was seldom mentioned. The namesake name carried no ceremonial power and the common name or nickname was often a humorous name by which a Chippewa was known throughout his life. In addition, in old times, a chief was known by his *ododem* or kinship group (52-54). Densmore also describes how the namer gave power to a child, but it rested somewhat with the child to further develop such power (54). Later, Omakayas's twin son is also named Chickadee, the name of Erdrich's fourth *Birchbark* novel. Omakayas's son Chickadee is named after his protector, a chickadee, who has unafrad perched near Omakayas when she gives birth to her twins in a late snowstorm, during *Iskigamizige-giizis*, the Moon of Maple Syrup. The other tiny brother is named Makoons (the name of the fifth novel), after the bear who also stays near at the time of the twins' birth. These little babies have powerful protectors that help them to survive (C 2-5).

Sometimes the names are modified by the bearer's character. An example of this is Little Pinch who is "renamed" Big Pinch by Nokomis due to his wild eating habits (TBH 47). Similarly, Omakayas's adopted little brother is nicknamed little Bizheens, or baby wildcat, by Nokomis (TGoS 9-10), and Pinch is called Quillboy or Quill, after he has his comic meeting with his spirit helper, a gaag or porcupine (TPY 13-17). Omakayas's son Chickadee is not as gifted with horses as his twin brother Makoons, so when he struggles with his wild fuzzy yellow pony, the twins decide to ironically call it Ninimoshehn, Sweetheart, and then loudly ask Sweetheart to stop biting or kicking, making the rest of the family laugh (M 13-15). These names are humorous nicknames or common names, as Densmore (52-54) explains. Sometimes special secret names are given. This happens to Omakayas, who dearly loves her name meaning Little Frog, although Deydey, Omakayas's father, wants to rename her after her heroic act of catching two eagle feathers. Deydey dreams that Omakayas should have the name of his grandmother, Ogimabinesikwe, meaning Leading Thunderbird Woman. Spirits would know Omakayas with this name (TPY 51- 57). As explained by Densmore, these special dream names were seldom mentioned due to their power (52). Animals, too, are named. Omakayas saves a crow and this pet crow, who always hops after her, is named "Andeg, the Anishinabe or Ojibwa word for crow" (TBH 73).

Naming the landscape requires terms that express the special nature of the relationship between humans and the land. Rocks, rivers, trees, mountains and so on were named based on factors other than rational markers of historical place. Place names could express community identity and ancestors, and they could inspire oral narratives (Grim 50). In *The Birchbark House* series, one of the most important place names is that of Omakayas's beloved home island, the Island of the Golden-breasted Woodpecker. Erdrich describes in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, how she names even the trees surrounding her home (7). But once these family members have died, their names are never mentioned again, since saying their name will attract them for a visit and it is better to let even the dearest ones continue their journey into the next world (TGoS 8).

4.2.3 RESPECTING NATURE/LAND WITH ALL ITS BEINGS

In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, nature/land is a healer and a teacher in many ways and nature/land provides materials for learning. When Omakayas is happily hopping after her grandmother Nokomis in search of the perfect birch tree to build their summer housing, she not only learns how to locate the perfect tree and gently remove its bark while asking permission from the tree as an "Old Sister," but Nokomis also shows her how to respect the spirits, or manitous, by offering them tobacco at the base of the tree (*TBH* 6-8). In *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority, and Ojibwe religion*, Michael D. McNally writes:

To live on the land, one must *live well* on the land, showing not only hard work and economic prowess but also a mastery of right relations with all other persons – which in an Ojibwe taxonomy includes nonhuman persons of the natural world (animals, plants, geological and weather phenomena) and of the spiritual world (ancestors, spirits, myths). (25)

After properly respecting manitous, Omakayas learns how to remove the bark, how to carry the light pink-brown rolls to the riverbank, how to thread the tough basswood strands and how to create a frame of bent willow poles and cover it with the mats of bark (*TBH* 8-9). Nokomis is the teacher of old ways for Omakayas, and she never skips offering tobacco and praying for the spirits' protection for her family. For example, when the new canoes, jeemaanan, are finished, Nokomis burns sweet grass and fans the smoke over the canoes, praying for a safe journey. (*TGoS* 74-75).

Omakayas has also learned to respect the forefathers in the form of the rocks, the asiniig, and when she is in trouble with her brother Pinch in the rapids, in a singing flood, in the dark of night and fearing for their life, she prays for their guidance and help and they are saved (*TPY* 3-6), saved by the asiniig and the spirits, Manidoog, and by the greatest and kindest of them all, the Gizhe Manidoo (*TPY* 21). Michael D. McNally, referring to *Ojibwe Heritage* by Basil Johnston, describes how old age was seen as a gift from the Great Spirit, a time when the elders passed on their valuable knowledge to the younger generation. Only when they vanished into the mists was their work with the younger generation completed (*Honoring Elders* 59). By including all these traditional elements in her stories, Erdrich teaches her readers, both Native and non-Native, both young and old, the cultural values and habits of the traditional Ojibwe, something that Erdrich herself still respects in her own life. For example, in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, she describes how before all important requests, or visits or journeys, tobacco is put down as an offering (14).

Many signs of nature give solace to the Ojibwe. When Omakayas's family is loading their canoes to leave towards the north, hundreds of yellow butterflies appear sending their gentle good-byes (*TPY* 58-59): "This is a good sign from the Great Kind Spirit who loves us all," says Nokomis. "This is like a smile from the Creator, my children." (*TPY* 59). When Omakayas's misses her brother, Little Thunder and Old Tallow, she whispers messages of love for the dragonflies to carry to her dear ones (*TPY* 80). Omakayas and Nokomis share a special loving relationship, founded on the fact that Nokomis daily teaches

Omakayas about medicine, herbs, roots and plants, the ways of the Midewiwin and how the most important human quality is kindness (*TGoS* 99-101). Their strength as a tribe is dependent on each other and the seven Ojibwe teachings of courage, humility, truth, respect, wisdom, honesty, and love (*Those Who Belong* 95) that were explained earlier by Doerfler.

Among the Ojibwe, there have traditionally been three types of medicine practice: Midewiwin, Je'sako, and Wa'bano. The rituals and beliefs of the Midewiwin form the core of Ojibwe/Menominee medicine today, whereas jugglers, or the Je'sako (tent shaker) were known as diviners and doctors of great power, who entered small birchbark lodges to pray to the spirits to heal the sick. When the spirits answered the prayer's call, the whole tent or lodge shook, and this gave the name to the medicine practice. Both Midewiwin and Je'sako can be defined as "good"⁷⁴ and benevolent medicine, meant for protection and restoring of harmony and health, whereas the third option was considered an "evil" one, that of a small, elite order called the wa'panos or Wa'bano, an ancient cult of Ojibwe prophets, who worshipped the Morning Star (McCafferty 730-752).

To become a true medicine person took many years of training. This is shown in a number of occasions in *The Birchbark House* series. For example, in *Chickadee*, even when Omakayas is already a mother and adult, she is not yet a medicine person (164). However, such medicine wisdom of the Ojibwe is not appreciated by the white clergy. In *The Game of Silence*, Deydey tries to convince Father Baraga of the goodness of Ojibwe medicine lodges, sweat lodges or praying houses, but he refuses to believe him and instead tries to convince Deydey to get his family baptized in exchange for showing him how to write words out of sounds in his language. He promises Deydey everlasting life but when Deydey asks whether his dead relatives would be there too, Father Baraga replies in the negative, since they were not baptized. Deydey in response willingly foregoes Christian paradise, because, as he says, "I want to see them!" (*TGoS* 189) when he dies. As explained earlier in connection with Native Ecology, all life forms are connected beyond time and space and all beings are part of a sacred circle, even after their death.

Omakayas's path to become a healer and medicine woman starts early on, when Omakayas is just seven years old and she encounters two bear cubs on her way back home from Old Tallow's house. The bear cubs slowly become friends with Omakayas and even take heartberries from her hand in the game they are playing. Omakayas calls them lovingly *ahneen*, little brothers. Suddenly, the mother bear appears and tests Omakayas with every sense – the bear stares down with her weak eyes, listens and smells Omakayas, and Omakayas smells the mother bear. Omakayas talks to the bear, calling her grandmother, and asks forgiveness for playing with her cubs. It seems she understands Omakayas's words and decides that she is not a threat (*TBH* 27-32). This meeting changes Omakayas's life, and Omakayas feels she and the bear mother have communicated with one another without words, without shared language. Omakayas has tried to follow Nokomis's advice and she addresses the bear with the greatest respect, as a treasured family member,

⁷⁴ The terms "good" and "evil" are (Western) cultural terms that do not totally cover the complexity of Ojibwe thought and the notion that all forces are interrelated, as expressed also by James Vukelich in his online teachings.

since as Nokomis has told her, bears do understand humans quite well, even if nobody quite understands the bear (*TBH* 34-35). Nokomis has taught Omakayas a lot about bears, so she knows many things. Bears are much like humans, either when they are skinned or when they are rocking their babies. All bear bones are highly respected and never tossed away, and the bear's skull, decorated with a ribbon and respectfully placed on a red cloth, is honored at a bear feast (*TBH* 35).

Michael Pomedli writes in *Living with Animals: Ojibwe Spirit Powers* in great detail about the relationship between the Ojibwe and bears. Pomedli emphasizes the importance of bears in Midewiwin tradition, and how for the Ojibwe bears had personal human-like qualities – a bear could understand human speech and it could freely transform itself into a human and a human could become a bear, both physically and symbolically, as happens with Fleur in Erdrich's *Tracks*. Humans and bears could share a fluid identity, so at times it was difficult to know whether a human was actually a bear or a bear was in reality a human. Out of respect, the Ojibwe addressed the bears not merely as Manitous but as honored guests (119-121). Pomedli also states that the bears knew well the medicines and the Ojibwe imitated their ways of healing and maintaining good health. The bears, who symbolized the spring and rebirth of health, could give the humans power to cure sickness, and the bear was seen as the link between humans and the Great Spirit (121-122). Ojibwe even called the bear *anijinabe*, or people, or an Indian person, and when a young girl got her first period, she was said to be "going to be a bear" (*wemukowe*), and also older women partook of bear spirits and at times fought like great bears (Pomedli 124-125).

The meeting with the bears is the first initiation for Omakayas to become a healer with powerful bear medicine. After the meeting with the bear mother, Omakayas falls silent and feels empty and faint inside, thoughts come to her, she hears voices like spirits talking and at times she feels the mother bear's powerful presence at her shoulder. Since that moment, Omakayas knows that when she needs the bear, she would be able to call her (*TBH* 35, 36). And the dizzy moments she experienced meant, her grandma said, "she was special to the spirits" (*TBH* 38). Nokomis even thinks of giving her the charcoal (blackening the face when going on a vision quest), had she not been still so young (*TBH* 39). Omakayas's meetings with her bear brothers and the bear mother are not over. Omakayas's mother is surprised to see how her daughter communicates with bear cubs and gives them pieces of bannock to eat. "Here, my brothers, sleep well!" (*TBH* 90).

Pomedli further explains how health and long life represented the highest good for the Ojibwe and therefore healers were highly respected in Ojibwe communities. Those who practiced bear path medicine received their teachings from previous generations, and the bear who could be an ill-tempered animal showed its kindness through its gift of bear medicine. When someone dreamed of a bear, that person would be expert in the use of herbs curing illness. Bear and Nanapush were the honorable patrons of the Ojibwe Medicine Society (146-147). Pomedli also states that "[f]rom bear stemmed the power over winds, the wisdom to discern the causes of disease, and a caring spirit that provided solace for the sufferer" (148). Nokomis is such a bear healer and at times, her medicine is needed even to heal the damage caused by their own, like in the case of the drunken relative LaPautre, who with his white

and mixed-blood associates robs Omakayas and her family. Due to LaPautre, Omakayas's family loses all their belongings and Deydey's eyes are hurt and later Nokomis tries to restore his eyesight with her balsam tree roots and needle tea (*TPY* 99). Later Nokomis misses her medicine plants for on the plains no such trees grow, but still, her medicine is strong and Deydey's eyesight remains good (*M* 22).

In the midst of the harsh winter, when smallpox has claimed many Ojibwe, Nokomis sends Omakayas to dream, with charcoal on her face, and finally Omakayas dreams of a dark cave with a loving motherly woman who promises to help Omakayas and who tells that she is the bear spirit woman, living now with Omakayas's great-grandma and great-grandpa (*TBH* 168-170). Omakayas tells her dream and vision to Nokomis, who is happy for her granddaughter and assures her that the bear lady will look after her in this world and that Omakayas should remember to offer her tobacco (*TBH* 170). Tobacco is offered when praying for help and when giving thanks, as when Omakayas offers her thanks to the Southern Thunderbirds when the southern wind has blown the snow away from the plains and she also begs the Creator to keep her Chickadee safe (*C* 74).

For traditional Ojibwe it is still important to show respect and thankfulness to benevolent spirits. In *Books and Islands*, when starting her trip to Rainy Lake, Erdrich gathers gifts for the rock paintings, such as tobacco, a ribbon shirt, red cloth and sage bundles (7). Tobacco, or *asema*, is very important in Ojibwe life. Erdrich explains, how "[t]obacco offerings are made before every important request, to spirits or to other humans." (*BaI* 14). "*Akawe asema*. First offer tobacco." (*BaI* 50). Tobacco is offered when visiting a lake, when starting or ending something important, when wishing to speak seriously or when starting a journey. Erdrich's grandfather used *kinnikinnick*, red willow tobacco, in his offerings, whereas she finds Nokomis, or "grandmother," her favorite offering with its rich sweet scent (*BaI* 15). Erdrich writes:

There was a time when I wondered – do I really believe all of this? I'm half German. Rational! Does this make any sense? After a while such questions stopped mattering. Believing or not believing, it was all the same. I found myself compelled to behave toward the world as if it contained sentient spiritual beings. The question whether or not they *actually* existed became irrelevant. After I'd stopped thinking about it for a while, the ritual of offering tobacco became comforting and then necessary. Whenever I offered tobacco I was for that moment fully there, fully thinking, willing to address the mystery. (*BaI* 16; emphasis original)

Vine Deloria Jr. also describes how by offering and burning tobacco, sweetgrass and sage, the spiritual world would open itself naturally to the medicine people (*The World We Used to Live In* 200).

Tobacco was also needed when communicating with the powerful thunderbirds. In *Books and Islands* Erdrich mentions rock paintings of thunderbirds, describing them as *Binessiwag* (thunderbirds) rather than *Animikiig* (giant birds or thunder spirits), spirits being particular about what they are called. These graceful and powerful spirits are unpredictable, "[t]hunder is the beating of their wings. Lightning flashes from their eyes" (72). With these spirits, you cover shiny objects, offer tobacco and put a feather

over the door. The thunderbird has only one natural enemy, the great snakes, the *Ginebigoo*, who live underwater and travel from lake to lake via watery tunnels (*BaI* 72). These themes were also common in Woodland weaving. “On the earlier bags rows of zoomorphic designs were common. Thunderbirds, spirits in panther form, as well as humans, were interspersed with bands of geometrical motifs [...]” (Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 74). In *The Birchbark House* series, Omakayas shows great respect to thunderbirds, offers them tobacco and prays to these binesiwag, the thunderbirds of storm, to have pity (*TGoS* 87). McNally mentions that if a mother dreamed about a Thunderbird and its certain qualities, the daughter was named accordingly (*Honoring Elders* 242). In Ojibwe tradition, there is no healing or teaching without respect. At all times, there is a deep and clear understanding of the interdependence of the human being and land, with all its powerful beings.

4.2.4 HEALER’S DREAMS AND VISIONS

To become an Ojibwe healer required patience and humbleness. One way of looking at *The Birchbark House* series is to see it as a “medicine story,” a story of how Nokomis slowly, patiently and carefully teaches and trains Omakayas in the traditional ways so that she may take her place one day as a tribal storyteller and as a healer with strong medicine. When Omakayas’s relationship with bears grows stronger, Nokomis shares with Omakayas her knowledge of bears, how they dig for medicine and how they are people too, but of a different kind, also caring for their children, eating like people do and treating themselves with certain medicinal plants. Bears are known healers, as are those who belong to their clan. (*TBH* 207). One of Omakayas’s first healing tasks is to try to pacify the screaming Pinch who, while trying to trick everyone that he has made his first kill, bumps into a kettle with boiling-hot syrup and gets the syrup over his feet. Gently and carefully, Omakayas administers the right herbs and pastes to heal Pinch’s feet, making Nokomis very pleased: “*Ho!* I couldn’t have done a better job,” she said. [...] “My girl, you’re strong in healing.” (*TBH* 214-215). For the rest of her life Omakayas remembers this incident and how happy it felt to help someone else, even if it was Pinch (*TBH* 215).

In his pan-tribal analysis of medicine people, Deloria writes that before appearing to a human in dreams, animals chose an individual based on his or her kindness to animals (*The World We Used to Live In* 3). At times, even while hunting, a chosen human received for example medicines and a mission to heal people of certain ailments (Deloria 9). Healing people was one of the primary gifts received during dreams or visions, and such gift was usually granted to a human by a bird or animal. If the healing powers were granted by elements, such as water, wind or thunders, they were usually “represented by a spirit in human form that later transforms itself into a helpful animal” (Deloria 44). Sometimes, the medicine man appeared as his patron creature, such a bear or a wolf, especially in the case of serious illnesses and at times, he did diagnosis with appropriate measures or sent the patient to another medicine person (Deloria 43). Once a medicine person received a dream or a medicine vision, it remained forever printed in his or her mind as a frame of

reference within which to exercise one's powers, assisted by the spirits (Deloria 83). However, to cure the previously unknown diseases brought by the white was challenging and complicated and at times impossible, resulting in severe epidemics (Deloria 47).

Similar to Vine Deloria Jr.'s analysis, one can claim that the significance of dreams and visions in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series include such dreams and visions that are related to identity, healing, survival and premonitions. Vision quests are related to identity formation and finding one's mission and guardian spirit. At times visions are so powerful that they are also predictions of the future. Erdrich explains in *The Game of Silence* (59-60) that when children are sent for a vision quest, they are taken by relatives to a special place for about four days and nights, with no food. The relative regularly checks on the young person to see that all goes well and she or he is safe, but the child fasts so that the spirits of animals or of the winds, the trees, the sky may feel pity and visit the child. Such a spirit will guard and protect the child throughout life. For the Ojibwe, it is important yet also frightening to search for a guardian. When Omakayas's training has progressed, it is time for her to take the charcoal and follow Nokomis, but she is afraid and does not want to go.

Omakayas is not afraid of animals or fasting but she is afraid of what she might dream. Days pass and finally she sees the bears who come to say goodbye to her, not because they are leaving but because it is time for Omakayas to leave the island. In her vision, she sees everything – how her family travels swiftly over waters and down the rivers, spending nights at temporary camps. She sees how her brothers grow up and how she herself becomes an old woman, telling stories. She sees a log cabin, not made of cedar, and she sees horses, the huge sky and the grass flowing like water (*TGoS* 223-232).

Vine Deloria Jr. (3) points out that animals choose empathetic humans, and similarly as Omakayas has been kind to her bear brothers, she becomes a chosen human who now receives dreams and visions that can help her family members survive. Omakayas's dreams and visions are many – in her dreams, she locates her lost family members and sees what they were doing, she sees shadows about future events and she sees her helpers appearing before her. Sometimes her dreams choose her. When Pinch is lost in a severe storm, Omakayas dreams about her little brother's whereabouts and how Pinch carries heavy stones (*TGoS* 90-91). When Pinch comes back home safely with the help of Old Tallow, that is exactly what he tells to Omakayas: he had been hauling rocks when he had supposedly “found” and “rescued” Old Tallow (*TGoS* 92). Later Omakayas dreams again, this time when her rival Two Strikes is sent out to fast for her spirits to find her. In her vision, Omakayas sees herself standing on a piece of bark, her face blackened, fearing both drowning and a great, dark shadow of the future (*TGoS* 124-125). Omakayas also dreams of her father, a counting stick in his hands, stranded on an island, where the migiziwig (eagles), have their nest. This causes the family to worry about his and Father Baraga's safety. Omakayas's dream turns out to be true and Deydey is rescued thanks to her. (*TGoS* 209-218). Significantly, one cannot will a vision, the dream chooses her: “She really hadn't tried to dream, or asked for a dream, or done anything but put out tobacco for the spirits. And yet this dream had chosen her.” (*TGoS* 218). Later, she also dreams about Nokomis and her

red beads that she then offers as a gift to the “little people,” who are dear to Nokomis, as a thank you for their helping her (*TPY* 9-10, 22). Omakayas’s dreams are very similar to those described by Vine Deloria Jr. above.

Mick Gidley describes in the Introduction to Alan Jacobs’s *Native American Wisdom* (5-6) how in many traditional Native cultures dreams and individual spirituality are linked. In ‘dreams’ and visionary states, often achieved through fasting and solitude, visions “could give the individual his or her name, mark the coming of age, or change their course of life.” For example, traditionally, Anishinaabeg would fast in their tree nests for up to ten days to have visionary dreams that would guide them on the war path or in hunting (Jacobs 8). Similarly, Vine Deloria Jr. writes in *The World We Used to Live In* that vision quests in many Native tribes established a relationship with spiritual powers in seeking their aid (xxiv). In dreams, the dreamer might receive some powers and abilities as well as songs and information from a benevolent spirit (Deloria 2), and sometimes predictions are given concerning the future, especially such predictions that could not have been foreseen to be valuable (Deloria 75). Sometimes a benevolent spirit could provide help even for someone who was awake, as in the case of Chickadee. When Chickadee is in great trouble, his small namesake protector teaches him his healing and strengthening song (*C* 113-115). Also, Deydey sings his spirit songs when they have lack of food in winter (*TPY* 111), baby Omakayas is kept alive by the song of the island birds, and when Omakayas hears the song of the white-throated sparrow, she knows it is her little brother Neewo (*TBH* 230-239).

When the winter is exceptionally difficult due to their uncle LaPautre’s act of robbery, Omakayas dreams of her helper bear woman who says she would need to take one of them but save the rest. This dream comes true in an exceptional sight, where Omakayas sees Old Tallow embracing a bear – they have frozen to death together and die upright (*TPY* 114-119). Omakayas holds close Old Tallow’s spirit bundle, offers it food and water, and hopes that Old Tallow will now protect her (*TPY* 122, 128-129). She promises to put this precious bundle on the most sacred little island she can find (*TPY* 180). Densmore describes the meaning of spirit bundles in *Chippewa Customs* (77-78): There were two customs of mourning, namely wearing outward signs of mourning and keeping a spirit bundle. A spirit bundle included a lock of hair of the dead person and it was wrapped in birch bark, forming the nucleus of the spirit bundle. After the night of the burial, the relatives took the spirit bundle of the deceased home with them. This was repeated for four nights. Usually after one year a feast was held and the lock wrapped in birch bark from the spirit bundle was buried beside the grave.

The medicine power of dreams and visions also runs in families, as does bear medicine, as explained earlier by Michael Pomedli. Omakayas’s son Makoons also dreams when he is sick, having been separated from his twin brother, Chickadee. Makoons’s vision in summer 1866 foretells that he would recover, become strong and hunt the buffalo on the plains, their family would have horses and they would feed their people. He also sees that they will have to save their family members but they cannot save them all (*M* 3-4). After they have lost Nokomis, Fishtail and Angeline, Chickadee asks Makoons whether they will still lose others, but Makoons, staring into the darkness, pretends to be asleep (*M* 3-4, 148). Even a healer could not heal all his dreams and visions.

4.2.5 CALLING FOR HELPING SPIRITS AND LEARNING NEW LANGUAGES

Sometimes the teachings provided by nature/land and one's surroundings can be demanding and taxing. In *The Birchbark House* series, these teachings take place at a time when Omakayas and her family need to be connected with their helping spirits to survive, while resisting the influence of the white and their culture and while learning to let go of things they cannot control. Erdrich also shows how the children need to learn to live a good Ojibwe life in all circumstances.

If the character of young Omakayas is that of a very proper and well-behaved future medicine woman, her brother Pinch is like a mischievous and humorous trickster figure who is also taught by nature but in quite a different manner. Pinch is often in trouble, and at one time he lets Andeg, Omakayas's pet crow, take all the blame for the lost chokecherries that Pinch could not resist. This results in Andeg getting punished, and as a result he vanishes into the woods. However, much like in traditional trickster stories where Nanabozho is punished for his greed, Pinch's severe stomachache quickly reveals who is to be blamed for the lost berries (*TBH* 82-88). Mama is disappointed: "You lied. The ghost foot carries off liars in the night! As for your stomachache, here is no medicine but enduring the consequences of your greed. You'll have to suffer, Pinch. Maybe this will teach you!" (*TBH* 88). Nokomis reminds Pinch to be respectful to animals: "Wait until you hear what Mukwah, the bear, says, or Grandfather Owl! Think of that!" (*TBH* 94). Vine Deloria Jr. describes how many tribes feared communication with the owl, which was considered a messenger of death, or at least ill fortune, and was associated with the appearance of ghosts (110).

Like a trickster who is at times humiliated for his misdeeds, Pinch also has to be dumped in mud and stinking weeds for his mischief (*TGoS* 42) and sometimes he has to surrender and let Omakayas and Nokomis treat his wounds and mishaps (*TGoS* 68-69). Wanting to become a great warrior, Pinch is instructed by Deydey about hunting skills. "A good hunter never blames another for a missed shot." (*TPY* 2). A warrior, moreover, should never be proud but have a humble heart and show respect to others. Nokomis reminds her family that no matter how talented Two Strike is in hunting, her skills are not hers but given by the Creator and could also be taken away by the Creator. (*TPY* 151-153). "In time, the Creator takes everything, as we know." (*TPY* 153). During his dangerous hunting trip with Omakayas, Pinch meets a baby gaag, a tiny porcupine, who falls on Pinch's face, covering him with quills. This gaag becomes his helping spirit and a medicine animal and stays in Pinch's hair, giving Pinch a new name, Quillboy (*TPY* 14-17). Porcupine is a charming character in his own right, like a slow and naughty little boy who always looks sleepy and bewildered and who loves eating fresh willow like a little man having a feast (*TPY* 50). Trickster-like, Pinch is mischievous and a ferocious eater, and clearly has a humorous function in *The Birchbark House* series.

Pinch learns to appreciate his helping spirit gaag, and throughout *The Birchbark House* series, it is important to respect one's namesake and helping spirit. When Omakayas's son Chickadee is made fun of, he wonders why he

was named after such a small creature as a chickadee. “Oh, my namesake, why did you choose me?” (C 25). Nokomis, however, chastises Chickadee for not respecting the small bird – “small things have great power” (C 27). Nokomis reminds Chickadee, how this tiny bird stays awake all winter in the cold, surviving with small seeds only and planning carefully how to hide and eat these little seeds so they last. They stick together, like the Anishinaabeg themselves, and are cheerful even in difficulties. Therefore Chickadee should be happy and proud to have such a name. (C 27-28). Nokomis’s reminder is a thematic crux in Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series – no matter how young or small we are, if the Ojibwe, or the Anishinaabeg, or all the people stick together, co-operate and help one another, difficulties and hardships are easier to overcome.

In his darkest moment of near starvation, Chickadee calls Gizhe Manidoo, the great and kind spirit, other helpful spirits and even the little people. His namesake, the little bird, hears Chickadee and speaks with him, advising him, like a caring father, how to find water and rabbits for food and most importantly, it teaches him his very own healing, strengthening song (C 113-115). “*I am only the Chickadee. Yet small things have great power. I speak the truth.*” (C 115, emphasis original). This little bird also advises Chickadee to help the hawks he would meet, and indeed, Chickadee meets two hawks, he feeds them and unbends their claws and they become his mothers and protectors, giving him their red tail feathers and later dropping a plump gopher on his path (C 117-119). Every evening Chickadee thanks his namesake for his survival and sings his song, when following the stream in his efforts to find home, but later he does not understand the tongue of this little bird (C 119).

Vine Deloria Jr. describes in *The World We Used to Live In* how there was a great power in the songs the medicine people received from the spirits (200). He also tells how the higher spirits, in the form of birds or other beings, join in, once the humans make a quest for a relationship and have shown respect, and in this way, they add to our understanding with their special knowledge and powers and help us understand our role in life (Deloria 107-108). Often one can see three kinds of communications between humans and other creatures. First, there is the sacred encounter, and second, there is a situation where the human is very vulnerable and the spirit being helps him or her either to find the way, or to provide food or to give a warning about a coming disaster. The third form of communication is a more secular situation where birds or animals comment on human activities and sometimes even tease and provoke people by flaunting their knowledge of these beings (Deloria 108). Also, if the humans behaved improperly, for example when hunting, the animals, such as the buffalo, corrected the human behavior by warning them in a vision (Deloria 121). For Omakayas’s family, all these three forms of communication are everyday realities, and in difficult situations they depend on the kindness of birds and other creatures to find food and shelter. For example, when Omakayas becomes close with the bear mother, she can feel her presence and hear a guiding voice (the sacred encounter) (*TBH* 35), or when Chickadee thinks he might die of exhaustion, his namesake, the little grey bird, leads him to water (the spirit being helping) (C 114), or when the buffalo realize how they are treated by humans and start a slow moaning sound (animals commenting

on improper human behavior): “Leaving the dead behind him, and the humans who lived off his people’s flesh, he went to be with his own.” (*M* 119).

The teachings provided by Nokomis and other family members are very similar to the earlier mentioned seven teachings characteristic to the Ojibwe. These teachings encourage the Ojibwe to follow all these seven guidelines, since they define Minobimaadizi or Living Well. These seven teachings of respect, love, truth, bravery, wisdom, generosity and humility are to be applied in everyday life, like in the life of Omakayas and her family. Omakayas respects her bear brothers, thunderbirds and other spirits, she loves their ancestral lands, and she learns from her family the importance of truth and brave behavior, like in the case of Old Tallow who, offered her life for the rest of the family. Nokomis embodies Ojibwe wisdom and generosity – she shares her garden seeds and knowledge of medicine – and Omakayas learns from her the importance of patience and humility. Michael D. McNally also refers to the Seven Grandfathers and explains how these significant *manidoog* look after early human beings and teach them how to live well with one another and creation (*Honoring Elders* 64-65). Similar to the Ojibwe teachings of Gizhi Manidoo, the great and kind spirit, Vine Deloria Jr., in *The World We Used to Live In*, referring to Shooter, a Sioux Elder, explains how Wakan Tanka makes all humans and animals, whether on the ground, in water or air, unique, so they rely on themselves, and all creatures and plants are a benefit to something and they have their own purpose to fulfill (xxviii). All beings search for their place and path, and when things change, they adapt to their environment (Deloria xxx) – animals adjust to different lands and the tribes similarly (Deloria xxxi). We are co-creators in the universe (Deloria xxx). Similarly, Ojibwe Jill Doerfler claims in *Those Who Belong* that the Anishinaabeg carry the power of creation. “We create ourselves. We carry the power to create a nation that honors ancestors and also envisions an everlasting future.” (x). Omakayas and her family rely on themselves and the everyday wisdom provided by Nokomis while adapting to new circumstances and new landscapes and while recreating their lives.

Similar to Doerfler’s point of honor, according to Jacobs, there were no written laws among the Indians. Rather, customs were handed down from one generation to the next. Such customs bound the Nation to behave in a certain way (84-85). With the increasing proximity of white culture, the Ojibwe needed to learn written laws and new customs, and like Nanapush in *Tracks*, they had to learn the “memory tracks” (writing) of the whites. Omakayas’s family have to adjust to their changing environment and new landscapes and yet respect and recreate their Ojibwe traditions and customs for the new generations. Omakayas’s sons learn to call the buffalo at the time of great need and they succeed in calling up a huge herd, making their family and their grandparents and their ancestors in the spirit world very proud (*M* 116). Dreese describes the power of language as twofold – it both protects and saves the lives of the people (29). Similar to Chickadee’s and Makoons’s ability to speak with their buffalo calf, Dreese refers to a Kiowa story of a storm-causing clay horse being pacified by the Kiowa speaking to it in their language (29). However, since the relations with the white have changed, the traditional language skills are no longer enough and even Deydey sees it as important for both his daughters, Angeline and Omakayas, to understand the language of the white, the chimookomanag memory tracks (*TGoS* 131). Other tracks

Omakayas already knows how to read. She learns from Nokomis how to see like the rabbit, or a waabooz, in her mind's eye to be able to set the snares in just the right places (*TGoS* 171).

In addition to learning the white man's language, Omakayas is constantly training to fulfill her calling as a healer. When it is time to leave the birchbark house and move to the winter lodge, Nokomis packs all her herbs, leaves and berries and other medicines with her, and now that Omakayas has encountered the bears, known for their medicine, Nokomis asks whether Omakayas hears the voices of the medicines. Omakayas answers no but she says that the bear cubs talk to her. This makes Nokomis very serious and with great emotion she encourages Omakayas to listen to these bears. "She spoke so earnestly, with such emotion in her voice, that Omakayas was always to remember that moment, the bend in the path where they stood with the medicines, her grandmother's kind face and the words she spoke." (*TBH* 104). Nokomis also reminds Omakayas to remember the old ways: "'Take their ways if you need them,' she said, 'but don't forget your own. You are Anishinabe. Your mother and grandmother are wolf clan people. Don't forget. Also, you sweat-bath yourself clean every day, even jump in the freezing lake, a thing that the chimookomanug do not do. My girl, don't become like them.'" (*TBH* 110). Take what you need – that is what Omakayas's family has done with their winter cabin. It is made in the chimookoman way, the stickiest clay isolating the cold between the logs and even with a tiny loft (*TBH* 121). This point – take what you need – is another important teaching by Erdrich and a way to protect the Ojibwe ways and culture as well as other Native cultures.

In *The Birchbark House* series, the Ojibwe take what they need – they learn the language of the white and later, when on the Great Plains, they learn all about horses, oxcarts and how to make them with wood, hide and rope, they learn to hunt like the Metis and how to make business with the Metis and the white, they deal with the Great Plains wolves and they learn all about the buffalo, also dream about them, and they become familiar with potatoes, cellars and the grass that rustles in the wind (*C* 133, 146, 165). Omakayas's son Makoons, the Bear Child, is especially gifted with horses and training buffalo ponies to help them with hunting (*M* 5-6). It takes a long time to teach the horses to learn to race just the right way in the buffalo hunt (*M* 18). All that they learn, they learn for the future generations (*C* 180). Uncle Quill, Omakayas's brother, saves the lost Chickadee with his oxcart and Chickadee gets to see towns and how business is made with skins and furs and how they are traded for all the things needed back home, such as hammers and nails, coffee beans, flour, sugar, tea and papers, ribbons, calico and candies (*C* 150-151).

There are many stories to tell about such towns with wide and insatiable mouths like St. Paul that are like the spirit world but on earth (*C* 155). But there are also healing stories, stories of one's past. Omakayas finally gets to know how she was actually that one surviving baby girl from the Spirit Island, saved by Old Tallow before she was even two winters old and fed with her rabbit soup and given to Yellow Kettle and Deydey as their daughter. She was kept alive by the song of the birds on that island, and she survived so she could save the others from smallpox and be a healer herself. This knowledge closes the circle in the first book, *The Birchbark House*. And now when Omakayas hears the

song of the white-throated sparrow, she knows it is her little brother Neewo who is at peace and ready to help Omakayas when needed (*TBH* 230-239).

For Omakayas and her family it is important to stay connected with nature/land and their Ojibwe traditions of helping spirits and medicine animals, while adapting to the new situation with an increasing dominance of white culture. To survive they need to learn new tracks, those of the chimookomanag memory tracks (*TGoS* 131), and they also need to learn new ways of communication with animals, such as buffalos. It is time for Omakayas to take what she needs for survival without forgetting her own ways, the old ways (*THB* 110).

4.2.6 PURIFYING AND HEALING OJIBWE TRADITIONS

In addition to stories, vision quests and spirit helpers, the sweat lodge tradition is very important for the Ojibwe. Especially in winter it is a way for the family to keep clean and healthy and send their prayers to the spirits. The nest-like structure of a sweat lodge has a pit in the middle for hot stones, grandfathers, the asiniig, where water and healing medicines are placed (*TGoS* 117). When the sweat bath is ready and all the women have entered the lodge, they sing and pray and Nokomis places fragrant tobacco on the glowing stones as well as the medicine, good smelling cedar tips. Steam rises when water is poured over the rocks. The women bring in the grandfather rocks four times and pray in each direction, till the moon rises peacefully (*TGoS* 137-138).

Vine Deloria Jr. describes how those who attended a sweat lodge often said they could hear the spirits entering when they stepped into the sweat lodge through the skin or covering blanket (89). The stones for a sweat lodge were collected in a special way and the medicine person who gathered them asked the stones who wanted to participate in the sweat lodge ceremony. After the ceremony, the stones were returned to their home (Deloria 153). The sweat lodge was built to remind one of the cosmos as a whole (Deloria 202). According to Vine Deloria Jr., in addition to the sacred mountains and the picture rocks, there were small medicine stones, rocks that were created by the thunders and had special powers and could be found in the ground or on the tops of the buttes (154-156). Sometimes the male rock was placed with the female tobacco plant for a year and afterwards a little rock would appear in the medicine bundle, and at times, a rock would appear after a dream and sometimes such rocks could create thunderstorms when wet (Deloria 157). The sweat lodge is also described in *Honoring Elders*, where McNally refers to Odawa storyteller Larry Plamondon's description, how the sweat lodge reiterates in spatial movement the four stages of life and draws on the powers of correspondence with the directional, seasonal as well as cosmic cycles (56). When Deydey dreams about Omakayas's new spirit name, a sweat lodge ceremony is conducted both for women and men, and after the cleansing ceremony with medicine herbs, Deydey reveals his dream about a great white eagle and his grandmother and Omakayas gets her name Ogimabinesikwe, Leading Thunderbird Woman, a name that spirits will use when calling her (*TPY* 54-57).

When Omakayas grows and her body is ready to give birth to this world, when she has her first moon, she will visit a woman's lodge and stay there alone, away from everybody else, and receive gifts and advice from the older women (TPY 156-157). Such a perfectly constructed bark lodge is just big enough for two or three women, with its rush mats and fir boughs, and all the women bring gifts for Omakayas when it is her time to stay there and fast for two days (TPY 169-170). Nokomis has carved a new wooden bowl and a bear spoon for Omakayas, Yellow Kettle gives her daughter a new dress, and Angeline gives her sister a brass thimble for sewing. She will fast two days and hear from Nokomis all the important things about woman's life and how she should live in the following year to make sure she will later get children. Nokomis tells her about how to read the sky, how to cook roots, how to predict weather, visitors, sickness and how to hunt in dreams. Together they also plan how to trade for new garden seeds and how to replenish their store of medicines (TPY 180-181). Densmore explains in *Chippewa Customs*, how "at the time of her maturity a young girl was required to isolate herself for four days and nights" (70). Her mother would prepare a small wigwam for her, and after her fasting, a feast was given (Densmore 70).

These different holistic everyday traditions purify the mind and body of the Ojibwe and keep them connected with the land, ancestors and protective spirits.

4.2.7 FROM BEAR BROTHERS TO HEAVENLY TWINS

In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, there are many levels of cultural information – the everyday life of Omakayas and her family is just that, everyday life, yet many names and stories include much cultural knowledge of the Ojibwe that interests also the older audience.

As a child, Omakayas enjoys the company of her bear brothers, and when she grows up and gets a family of her own with Little Thunder, she has twin sons, Chickadee and Makoons, who were born "in the thaw of late winter, when steam travels from the dens of bears to signal their birth" (M 2). Twins are important for the Ojibwe, and they all know how in tribal stories it is the twins that are blessed and create the Ojibwe world. It is considered good fortune to know twins or be in a family or even in the presence of such twins. So when the Meti brothers steal Chickadee, this is considered a great evil (C 46). One version of this creation story with the twins of the Anishinaabeg people is depicted by Ojibwe medicine painter Simone McLeod in her painting *Niizhooendenhyag Niigiwn* (Birth of The Twins). On her web page, she describes how Sky Woman gave birth on the back of the Great Turtle to twins, man and woman, and how Sky Woman called them Anish or spontaneous, since they appeared of nothing. Hence the name, Anishinaabeg or Spontaneous Beings. Before the twins, Sky Woman had conceived a mere spirit being Ojichaag and a mere physical being Wiyaw but only these Anishinaabeg tended toward a union with one another – they were not complete or fulfilled without the other. Both the male and female twin had now Ojichaag and Wiyaw. Sky Woman nurtured these twins and then she danced the sacred dance and reached to the

moon, changing her name to Yellow Sky Woman and even today the Anishinaabeg honor her through Nokomis Dibik-Giizis, Grandmother Moon, when Night Sun shines on their precious island home.⁷⁵

As in the creation myth, Chickadee and Makoons are not fulfilled or completed without one another, and while Chickadee sobs his brother's name, Makoons tears leak through his fingers elsewhere (C 111-112), and when Makoons longs for his brother, he falls ill and nothing will cure him and his fever, neither rose hips nor cherry bark (C 143-144), nor willow bark (C 163) and not even songs for the spirits (C 188-189). Makoons, who will only smile in his sleep, also constantly feels his brother's presence and that scares Nokomis and Omakayas – maybe Chickadee is also dead and calls for his brother (C 144, 164, 187-189). Chickadee sees in his dream how Makoons is still, quiet and drained, asking help from Chickadee: "Please, help me to live." (C 182). Only when Makoons finally sees his brother Chickadee, "the other half of his soul" (M 1), and Chickadee sings his healing song to his brother, does Makoons get back his life force and licks happily his half of the peppermint stick brought by Chickadee from the town (C 190-191). Also, as in this creation myth of the Anishinaabeg, Erdrich in *The Birchbark House* series names Omakayas's grandmother Nokomis and her mother Yellow Kettle, possibly a modified form of Yellow Sky Woman. Michael Pomedli (142) also describes how Sky Woman gave birth to two crying human babies, twins, who were the parents of the Anishinaabe. To sustain her helpless babies, Sky Woman asked the animals and plants to provide honey, seeds, fruits and berries for them, and a bear mother offered herself as meat for the babies, thus becoming the Anishinaabe guardian and a sacred symbol of motherhood and an animal to be respected and honored.

4.2.8 CONCLUSION: NATURE/LAND AS A TEACHER AND A SOURCE OF HEALING

To summarize, from the point of view of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, nature/land is a teacher and a source of healing to Omakayas and her family in many ways. Nature/land is the source of the sacred and of everyday survival. It provides the Ojibwe with healing stories, based on the seasons, healing herbs, dodem animals, spirit helpers and protectors and special nature/land - related names that guide and protect their lives. Nature/land provides them with the Seven Grandfather Teachings and it teaches the Ojibwe about love, patience and honesty, the interconnectedness of all life forms, and sharing and caring for one another when times are harsh. They also learn to respect the power of nature/land including the power of the smallest of beings, their forefathers and the old ways, a respect symbolized, for example, by tobacco offerings. Nature/land provides medicine and other visions and dreams that heal and support the Ojibwe and it gives them guidance in the form of names

⁷⁵ McLeod, Simone. *Fisher Star Creations*. (www.fisherstarcreations.com/native-woodland-artists-portfolio-1-birth-of-the-twins).

and visions. Omakayas's family can also become purified and get answers in their sweat lodge and other ceremonies. They learn the power of songs and to think and feel like an animal to become an honorable hunter. They learn to respect the small people and all things small, such as a single bird song that kept Omakayas alive as a baby.

The above-mentioned elements also relate to many aspects of deep ecology. Referring to Barnhill and Gottlieb's list of the most common features of deep ecology (6), one can see that Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and its sacred quality. Nature/land is seen as a holistic teacher and healer, and interrelationships and equality are emphasized in the Ojibwe worldview. Omakayas and her family see themselves as part of nature/land, and they accept the teachings of survival from nature/land with humility and with a responsible spirit. They value their everyday life in nature/land, and their relationship with nature/land is intuitive and profound yet not "supernatural" in Western dualistic terms.

As far as David Kronlid's categorization of ways to relate with nature goes (61), one may add that in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series the earth is seen as a whole and all beings, whether animals, plants, trees or humans, are of equal value and affect each other. Nature/land is the endless source of knowledge and healing and to master such knowledge takes a long time, as the story of Omakayas shows. Humans are partners with all living beings, and the Ojibwe and their land form a breathing and living ecosystem that includes all beings, past and present, as depicted in the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecology.

When studying *The Birchbark House* series and those stories of nature/land where land provides both teaching and healing for Omakayas and her family, one can notice that many of the key notions of Native (Ojibwe) Ecology are represented in Erdrich's stories. The relationship between Omakayas, Nokomis and nature/land is one of compassion and empathy. Nokomis shares her knowledge, and Omakayas humbly, patiently and respectfully listens to her grandmother's heartfelt teachings. At all times nature/land teaches them all to share in order to survive, avoiding the misuse of power or recourse to egocentricity. Nokomis teaches Omakayas about nature's /land's healing powers and medicine in the form of healing herbs and healing stories as well as through visions and vision quests. All forefathers, animal protectors and manitous, mischievous Nanapush included, are present in such teachings. Through her own example, Nokomis shows Omakayas and her family what *bimaadiziwin* or "the good life," *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well and *Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan* or Keeping the Land means in practice. As further described in chapter five, the cultural Anishinaabeg tradition of *Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan* (Keeping the Land) is expressed through three practices, namely *akiing ondaqji'idizowin* (land-based livelihood practices), *akiiwi-gikendamowining* (land-based knowledge) and *aadizokewin* (telling of legends and teachings) (*Routledge Handbook of Landscape Character Assessment: Current Approaches to Characterisation and Assessment* by Fairclough et al. 243-244). These three aspects are visible in the everyday life of Omakayas and Nokomis, when Nokomis teaches Omakayas the healing Ojibwe stories and traditions and how to survive in nature/land and how to properly respect land and all her relatives.

4.3 STORIES OF NATURE/LAND AS A SOURCE OF SURVIVAL, CHALLENGES AND HAPPINESS

In chapter 4.2, I took a closer look at the role of nature/land as a source of teaching and healing, and in this chapter my focus lies in such stories of nature/land in *The Birchbark House* series that depict nature/land as a source of survival, challenges and happiness.

The whole *Birchbark House* series reflects the traditional Ojibwe relationship with nature/land and all the happiness and challenges Omakayas's family experiences while living from the land. Nature/land with its seasons and bounty is a great source of survival, joy and happiness for the family but also a changing landscape filled with challenges, obstacles and hardships, even if the "chimookoman" or "big knife" (*TBH* 76), that is white people with their schemes and greed, are the greatest source of fear for the Ojibwe.

When these themes of survival, challenges and happiness are analyzed in the framework of Native (Ojibwe) Ecology, it becomes visible, as shown in the following subchapters, how at all times, Omakayas and her family search for balance and harmony in nature/land and their community, asking help from Gizhe Manidoo, the great and kind spirit and gaining strength from their tribal rituals and traditions. They humbly and respectfully care for one another, and especially in the times of hardships they take shelter in the Seven Grandfather Teachings of a good Ojibwe life. Nature/land provides them with all that they need for their everyday survival from nourishment to rest and peace and at all times they show respect for all living beings, seeing them as their equal. In the face of changes and difficulties, they call for medicine, visions, forefathers and healing stories and they also appreciate the healing Ojibwe humor. In this section, I look at all the five novels in *The Birchbark House* series to analyze how these aspects of survival, challenges and happiness are visible in Louise Erdrich's stories.

4.3.1 NATURE/LAND AS A SOURCE OF SURVIVAL

To survive as an Ojibwe in the 19th century US, you needed to have a close relationship with nature/land, which provided food, such as game, corn, berries and fish, and necessary materials for example for clothing, babies' diapers, household items, different instruments and even canoes. All these were needed for a happy and balanced Ojibwe life, even if at times such activities like tanning the hides or gutting fish were not much to Omakayas's and other Ojibwe youngsters' liking.

Reciprocity between humans and animals was particularly required in hunting. To be a proper Ojibwe hunter meant that one needed to learn the ways of the animals and to respect the manitous. The Ritzenthalers describe how the old men asked *the manidog* to grant certain favors to a family whose boy killed his first game (37), and if a hunter wanted to be successful, he had to first fast and sacrifice before going to hunt and he needed his hunting

bundle with certain charms or medicine as well as magical and non-magical techniques to guarantee hunting success (25). The Ritzenthalers also mention that when the men went hunting, they could ask the children back home to fast on their behalf for hunting luck (34). The starving Ojibwe also asked help from the Mide members, who sang their songs and shook their rattles through night, helping in this way the other tribal members to catch game (Densmore 121). Reading natural signs is also an important talent in Erdrich's saga. In *The Birchbark House*, Nokomis has true dreams that guide Deydey to find game for the starving family. "She squinted. Looked deeper into her dream. Nodded slowly. 'When you come to the tallest of the trees, go toward the lake, then around the rocks and back into the trees. There, the buck will wait for you.'" (182). Deydey can read the ice, to see whether it is safe or not to cross the lake (TGoS 205) and Chickadee knows which way is north, based on the moss side of the huge pine trees (C 96). Omakayas's husband can read the story in tracks: "He read the tracks just like white persons read books." (C 128).

Food and its bounty or scarcity is also dependent on nature/land and weather conditions, and the role of a grandparent in teaching understanding land-based traditions is essential. In *The Birchbark House* series, at times the season is poor and for example wild rice stalks grow thin and too quickly, and the year ahead will be sparse. Still "the rice boss blessed the harvest" each morning (TBH 95). The moment when to collect manoomin is very special, and once Omakayas is overeager and ruins some harvest by knocking the wild rice down too early. Deydey's words humiliate Omakayas but they are meant to teach her: "My daughter, there is a way we do things. We do it to take care of the rice. [...] You went against the way things are supposed to go. You didn't listen to your old ones, your own grandmother among them." (TGoS 81). In *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority, and Ojibwe Religion* (1), Michael D. McNally describes how the relationship between a grandchild and a grandparent, like that of Omakayas and Nokomis, was of paramount importance and how grandparents were and still are the primary educators of the young people in matters of ethics and tradition. Grandparent is the person who guides one how to relate with the divine, and in prayers the spirits are addressed as grandfathers and grandmothers, indicating their privileged position between people and the spiritual realm (*Honoring Elders* 1). To be called "that old man" or "that old woman" is a great honor for an Anishinaabe (*Honoring Elders* xii). McNally also emphasizes that learning how to understand nature from grandparents and the elderly was not an easy or quick process but demanded training, practice and hard work to cultivate a right attitude and the knowledge and practice of relatedness – Indians were not *naturally* one with nature (*Honoring Elders* 48, emphasis original). The relationship with a grandmother or grandfather was one of respect, trust and intimacy (*Honoring Elders* 128). Training Omakayas to become a healer who knows her herbs and bear medicine takes a long time in *The Birchbark House* series. "Grandma's deep and far-seeing eyes took in Omakayas. She seemed to see her granddaughter from the inside out. She watched Omakayas for a long time, then shook her head. No. Not yet." (TBH 39).

Also, manoomin, as mentioned above and earlier in this thesis, has a special role in Ojibwe culture. Similar to the maple-sugar camps in the early spring, the wild rice was harvested in the rice camp in the autumn, and each family had their share of the rice field that they marked in the summer (Densmore

128). Erdrich writes: “They all fit into the canoe with plenty of room to spare. That space, they hoped, they would fill with the wild rice, the manomin, the good seed that would sustain them through the winter.” (*TBH* 92). The Ritzenhalsers (26) describe how at the harvest time tobacco was offered to the Wild Rice spirit and the chief asked the weather to be good for four harvesting days. He also threw tobacco to the fire to appease the Thunderbirds. After the Ojibwe had harvested, the Underneath spirits and the Thunderbirds could get their share. Then the pipe was smoked and a feast was held. Similarly, when Omakayas’s family travels in *The Birchbark House* to the great sloughs of Kakagon, they offer tobacco: “Before they started out, Grandma gave her tobacco to the water and asked to a safe, smooth crossing.” (92-93).

Erdrich describes in *Books and Islands* the importance of rock paintings, like the painting of wild rice. Such paintings are alive, they refer to a spiritual geography, and they provide tracks for survival, “teaching and dream guides to generations of Anishinaabeg” (50). She describes: “Once you know what it is, the wild rice spirit looks exactly like itself. A spiritualized wild rice plant. Beautifully drawn, economically imagined. [...] This particular spirit of the wild rice crop is invoked and fussed over, worried over, just as the plants are checked throughout the summer for signs of ripening.” (*BaI* 51). In *The Birchbark House* series, especially Nokomis attends her garden with great love and care and she heartfully blesses her pumpkin seeds and other garden plants to guarantee the survival of her family (*TBH* 226-227).

When the family moves to the Great Plains, their foods become somewhat different, too. The biggest difference is, of course, the buffalo. Also, they eat wild onions, potatoes and all sorts of wild bird eggs (*M* 23-24), and they catch golden eyes and fat, slow catfish, geese and ducks (*M* 36-37) and hunt deer and antelope (*M* 100) as well as beavers, prairie chickens and even gophers (*M* 105). They have horses and sheep, and they use elm barks as their plates (*M* 27-28), and if they eat ducks, they carefully return the bones back to the water, to respect the ducks so that they may let the Ojibwe catch them again (*M* 29). Nothing is wasted – the bark plates are burnt after the meal and leftovers will make tomorrow’s soup (*M* 33). John A. Grim mentions how in the conceptual systems of many indigenous peoples, animals and plants were seen to willingly sacrifice their own lives for the human in need (51).

In addition to buffalo hunting, there are also other tasks that are needed to survive the harsh winters both on islands and when living on the Great Plains. Corn is dried and parched and pounded to meal as well, fish are dried with cedarwood, and a place for a winter food cache is created to store all dried and smoked fish and venison, makuks of wild rice and even little maple sugar, and then Nokomis blesses the cache, making them all feel safe, protected and eternal (*TBH* 99-101). Nokomis always blesses their food, with thanks to Gizhe Manidoo (*M* 28), and in spring it is time for Nokomis to bless the pumpkin seeds and other garden plants (*TBH* 226-227). She loves being outside any time of the year, picking medicines or setting snares (*TGoS* 172). Blessing and thanking are important elements in the daily life for the Ojibwe – when the family has survived a harsh winter and spring and are again happily together, it is time to have a feast of thanks (*M* 18). In spring, there is often a healing ceremony with drums to cure the winter’s illnesses and to teach all the ways of Anishinabe around the tribal fire (*TBH* 208-210). To survive harsh times also required sharing, as earlier discussed by Bohm and Fixico, and the Ojibwe

believed that if they practiced sharing with everyone, following the path of the Great Spirit, like the spirits who shared with humankind, and if they lived in accord with the land and its stories, following the Midewiwin, they could live a good life, protected from diseases (Pomedli 69).

In terms of everyday survival, throughout *The Birchbark House* series, Erdrich gives very detailed information about the material culture and daily life of the Ojibwe. She explains daily duties and gives an insight into the natural materials that are used for clothes, utensils and other items. Similarly, in *Chippewa Customs*, Densmore (119-123) presents the narrative by Nodinens, a 74-year-old Ojibwe woman, covering the entire cycle of the year. Based on her story, one can see the following tasks that were done by men and women. All of them worked hard, and some of the tasks that were typical for Ojibwe men were hunting and fishing, bringing in logs, shoveling away snow in winter, taking care of traps, counting time by using a special stick, taking care of Mide duties and teaching values and good life to children in the evenings. Among other things, Ojibwe women weaved mats, dried meat, prepared clothes, made sugar, dried berries, gathered cedar, planted gardens and did autumn fishing. Nokomis though not only planted gardens and attended other female matters, she also taught Omakayas about Ojibwe values, healing and storytelling.

Erdrich also shows how some of the necessary duties for the Ojibwe to survive are not always very pleasant. For example, tanning the hides is something Omakayas and later her own sons want to avoid at all costs. The oozy feel of moose brains and the endless boring rubbing to make soft hide for makazins is not one of Omakayas's favorite duties (*TBH* 14). Tanning buffalo does not feel any more pleasant for Omakayas's sons when the family lives on the Great Plains (*M* 80). Even though young Omakayas knows how important it is to have warm makazins for winter, tanning means numb fingers, a hurting back and stinking skin (*TBH* 15, 17). Densmore (31) mentions how the tanning of hides was the work of women and in their expert hands the hides became soft and golden brown in color. Deer and rabbit hides were used to cradle boards, inside children's moccasins and when making children's caps. Omakayas wishes to sew rabbit makazins for her little brother Neewo (*TBH* 129) and make healing moose hide mittens for Old Tallow who has lost her finger in cold winter (*TGoS* 183-185).

When describing such simple tasks as gutting fish, Erdrich also includes cultural information on the Ojibwe in her *Birchbark House* novels. While mentioning how gutting the fish is not one of Omakayas's favorite tasks but that she likes the delicious soup with fresh bannock (*TGoS* 34, 36), she also adds, how even the fish are shown respect by the Ojibwe – after picking the last flesh from their bones, the fish spines and bones are always thrown back to the waves out of respect, so that the Ojibwe may get fish later too (*TGoS* 72). Men participate in household duties as well. Deydey is very handy and while listening to Nokomis's stories, he makes, for example, different kinds of snowshoes and drums, he carves pipes and doll's cradle boards and snow snakes for children's games (*TGoS* 165). Every natural product is used but when on the Great Plains, many materials are different – Nokomis realizes that there are very few birch trees on the plains, and they make poor baskets and buckets (*C* 146).

In her novels, Erdrich describes many chores that the Ojibwe women take care of but at times, the task at hand demands work from the whole family. This is the case for example with jeemaanan, canoes. These birchbark canoes would carry the family through the year, and sometimes they even sell them. Making such jeemaanan requires much materials from birchbark and cedar to jack-pine roots, pails, water and stones. And when the right materials are found, thanks are given by offering tobacco (*TGoS* 67-68) According to Densmore (150), the canoe was of great economic importance to the Chippewa, and the largest canoes could carry more than ten people. Hence, the canoe makers were highly respected amongst the Chippewa. The canoes were made of birch bark and cedar and their design varied, depending on whether they were made for speed or for safety in the transportation of commodities. The Chippewa traditionally believe that originally Winabojo taught them to make canoes.

In the course of *The Birchbark House* saga, Erdrich shows how everyday life changes for the Ojibwe and how Omakayas and her family need to learn new survival skills when traveling from the lakes to the Great Plains. In the Great Plains, there are not enough rivers, so canoes are replaced by horses – “Dakota territory still belonged to the buffalo, the hunters of the buffalo, to the wolves and the eagles” (*M* 5). They learn the new ways of slow-moving trains of dogs, children and pack-laden horses who follow the buffalo hunters and take care of the skinning, meat drying and pemmican preparing as well as hide tanning and smoking (*M* 48) and beading and beautifying everything from moccasins to pants and cradle boards (*M* 106). Preparing and seasoning pemmican with berries and herbs, with wild bergamot and rose hips, is very time consuming but this food is light and nutritious food for traveling and the family stores it in rawhide containers and trade even, if they have extra (*M* 67, 69-70). All in all, buffalo hunting and buffalo preparations are something everybody participates in, except Nokomis who cares for her garden. For children, it is more about practice for the future – Omakayas’s boys eagerly make their bows and arrows with the right kind of ash tree and practice with them (*M* 67-68).

Erdrich also includes information about the baby care traditions of the Ojibwe. In addition to food, healing herbs and other medicines, the natural environment also provides for the family’s smallest members. In *The Birchbark House* series, babies are rocked in branch-held tikinagun or cradle boards, and diapers are provided in the form of spongy moss and old oak punk (*TBH* 37), and in winter the babies are carried over the ice in bark sleds (*TPY* 143). Densmore (48-49) describes how Ojibwe babies spend most of their first year of life in a cradle board that mothers carried on their backs. Traditionally, the babies did not wear much clothing but were surrounded by soft and light moss which was removed when necessary. When the weather was cold, a baby’s feet were wrapped in soft rabbit skin or cat-tails.

Erdrich’s audience learns about traditional Ojibwe clothes, design and different materials used for everyday household items. The clothes and accessories are beautified in the hands of talented Ojibwe women with green vines, leaves and glowing crimson flowers (*TBH* 126). Densmore (183-186) describes the development of design in *Chippewa Customs*. The oldest patterns were geometric line patterns, and birch-bark transparencies were copied in woven bead bands. There were also patterns with angular outlines, such as stars, as well as patterns with double-curve motive. The Ojibwe were,

however, mostly known for their floral patterns, both conventional and modern. Especially the wild rose was a much-used motif, as it grows in profusion throughout Ojibwe lands. Later, when Omakayas has grown up and marries Little Thunder, she decorates his outfits with beaded strips, feathers and flowers (*M* 11). Her mother and grandmother work on blankets and fancy moose-hide coat jackets, beautiful dance fans and birchbark boxes (*TBH* 129-130). Omakayas's son Chickadee wears fur moccasins, a buckskin shirt, decorated with porcupine quills, and warm woolen vest, fur mitts, and a fur-lined hood, and Chickadee loves his warm clothes, no matter if they are dirty. So when Mother Anthony is trying to force him to wear white rags, he quickly escapes to enjoy the sweet sounds of the woods (*C* 94-95). Reed is used to weaving mats (*TGoS* 31) and children's toys, together with corn husks, little pebbles and acorn-caps (*TGoS* 38). Also, special gifts between boys and girls are found in the natural world, such as a little round stone that Little Thunder, Omakayas's future husband, places in her snow house (*TGoS* 193-194).

Music, as an integral part of Ojibwe culture and even healing traditions in the 19th century, also supports Ojibwe survival, and in *Chippewa Customs*, Densmore (165-168) mentions how the old-time Chippewa used two drums, the hand drum and the Mide drum, and the jugglers and the members of Midewiwin used rattles when singing the Mide songs. All Chippewa flutes had six finger holes and they were made of, for example, cedar, box elder, ash or sumac. The flute was usually played by young men to attract or please Ojibwe maidens. In *The Birchbark House* series, the immediate natural environment provides materials for instruments, such as wooden flutes, and when Animikiins, Little Thunder, plays the loon flute he has carved for Omakayas, he wins her heart and makes her wonder whether at night he dreams of her (*TPY* 140-141, 166). Some songs are traveling songs, some songs are for healing and some songs are for hunting, as the one Animikiins hears in his mind, sung by Omakayas, when he nearly drowns when hunting a moose (*C* 7). In addition to songs, the birch bark scrolls are important in *The Birchbark House* series to maintain shared tribal memory – they are used to keep “the records for the religious gatherings, the Midewiwin, the etched stories and songs” (*TBH* 191).

The natural environment of the Ojibwe provides essential materials for offerings and blessings, such as tobacco and pipe, okij (pipe stem) (*TGoS* 146), which are an integral part of the Ojibwe traditions. In her novels, Erdrich mentions several occasions with tobacco and pipe offerings and blessings, such as morning prayers, blessing of the foods, praying to the spirits for protection and a safe return and asking for bear medicine as well as giving thanks. Tobacco offerings are also part of everyday activities. For example, winter foods are blessed by Nokomis using tobacco. She blesses their winter food cache, and she gently offers tobacco asking the spirits protect them against cold, since they are small and winters are tough (*TBH* 101). Like her grandmother, Omakayas learns to offer tobacco to her bear brothers when she asks them to give her their medicine to be able to help her family, and since then the voices she hears about herbs and mushrooms grow stronger (*TBH* 202-203). When Omakayas shares this with Nokomis, she takes her pipe and the smoke creates a small holy room where they, the grandmother and the granddaughter, a healer to be, sit together (*TBH* 204-207).

At times, when needed, the whole family sits by the fire and offers tobacco. When the community are worried about the safe return of Deydey who has

gone with Father Baraga, Nokomis brings her pipe and they all touch the pipe or smoke it together, sending their thoughts and prayers high up to the skies, to the great and kind spirit who shows pity on the Anishinabeg. "Omakayas felt a sense of peace. No human hand touched her, but she felt as though someone infinitely kind laid a palm on her forehead." (*TGoS* 208). Later when Omakayas's son is kidnapped and the whole family needs instruction, the men take out their pipes and "together the family looked into their hearts" (*C* 108). When Deydey catches One Horn, he offers tobacco to the deer's spirit and thanks him (*TBH* 183).

Densmore (144) mentions, how both Ojibwe women and men smoked pipe – the pipes smoked by women were usually small and made of the black stone and the men's pipes were of red pipestone. Especially the ceremonial pipes were elaborately decorated. Fishtail, one of Omakayas's family members, has a fancy sumac pipe, marked with a sweet grain that he uses for prayer every sunrise. For him, the pipe is a living thing, and his red pipestone bowl has the shape of an otter's head, his clan, with "[d]ark blue pony beads hung down a swatch of fringe" (*TBH* 75).

As it is clear by now, in traditional Ojibwe culture, tobacco is primarily used for offerings, rather than the pleasure of smoking, whereas the white man's burning water, the *ishkodewaaboo*, turns out to be dangerous for the Ojibwe, and risking their survival. Deydey calls alcohol a "false spirit," causing much trouble (*TGoS* 139). It causes much havoc, as in the case of the government storehouse agent who got drunk and burnt down the storehouse containing the land payments (*TGoS* 196-197). Also, LaPautre who has become an alcoholic, robs Omakayas's family and causes great trouble that will eventually lead to his own destruction (*TPY* 109).

To summarize, nature/land is the basis of survival for the Ojibwe, like Omakayas and her family, and Erdrich provides rich information about the everyday life of the 19th century Ojibwe in her *Birchbark House* novels, thus making them suitable for older audience as well. The overall wellbeing of the Ojibwe is dependent on nature's/land's gifts and it is natural for the Ojibwe to respect and thank nature/land and all its beings. At times nature provides them with great joy but there are also times of suffering and challenges that are described in chapter 4.3.2.

4.3.2 NATURE/LAND AS A SOURCE OF CHALLENGES

In *The Birchbark House* series, Erdrich paints a realistic, even if a fictional picture of the Ojibwe life in the 19th century. She does not idealize the life by the Great Lakes nor in the Plains but rather shows how Omakayas and her family are like any family with their joys and sufferings, their sorrows and losses. Their daily life in nature involves also many challenges, and at that time the Ojibwe turn to their spirit protectors. Below I describe some of the challenges faced by Omakayas and her family, such as lack of food, hunting difficulties, diseases, thunders, storms and rains as well as more fearful spirits, such as owls, and the fact that they cannot control their lives, especially as it comes to the influence of white people.

Spirits are important, for example, in such winters when there is only little food. At those times Deydey sings his spirit songs, “hoping to conjure an animal near or at least pluck up their courage” (*TPY* 111). The Ritzenhalers describe how the conjuror could call on certain supernatural spirits and consult them when he needed help (97-98). One of the worst times was when LaPautre had stolen all that Omakayas’s family had. Normally, this time of the year in winter, they had pemmican, mushrooms, nuts, dried fish, wild rice and fats and berries, but now they had nothing and were risking starvation and smoking kinnikinnick to help with hunger pains (*TPY* 112-113). Starvation was often common during hard winters, and to learn to tolerate the hunger pains, the children were taught to fast, as earlier mentioned in connection with hunting luck (Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 34).

Also, the buffalo (or the bison) is important for several Native tribes throughout the history yet buffalo/bison hunting is unpredictable. Ken Zontek writes in *Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison*:

It’s difficult to think of another group of humans who have become so intertwined with a wild animal species that it pervaded their culture. Bison permeate virtually everything material for Native Americans as well as the spiritual, as exemplified by many of the plains groups and to a lesser extent groups located farther from the heart of the bison landscape. Moreover, Native people did not lose their physical relationship with the bison after the demise of the great herds. They retained access to smaller groups, or later captive herds, even after their alienation from their lands, which culminated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (xiv)

In *Makoons*, Erdrich describes the difficulties of hunting buffalo. At times, the buffalos are easy to approach, maybe lulled by a nice weather and gentle wind (*M* 53), but occasionally, there are no buffalos in sight and the Ojibwe need to ask help from the buffalo calf and even from Omakayas’s sons who have learned to communicate with their buffalo calf (*M* 101, 110). Omakayas’s sons call the buffalo with their special call over and over again (*M* 115). It is not a simple matter to find the buffalo – they are known to come from a hole in the earth and that they can return there any time they like (*M* 102). Many things can make it difficult to find the buffalo, for example the noisy steamboats scare the herds away (*M* 103). One time, the buffalo behave very strangely. They do not snort in rage but are moaning slowly, wailing in pain, terrifying all Ojibwe. “The buffalo people are taking leave of the earth,” cries Animikiins, who stands transfixed, beside his sons. “Soon the generous ones will be gone forever.” (*M* 118). This sad scene is followed by the buffalo calf leaving Chickadee and Makoons, his human brothers, now that he has seen the truth of humankind. He goes to live with his own (*M* 119).

Winters are often difficult, and the spirit of winter, Binoonang, makes life hard for the Ojibwe (*C* 19), and sometimes this spirit is trying to keep its claws of ice on the world, not letting the spring come (*C* 22). After the smallpox epidemic, the Ojibwe have only a little strength to hunt or fish, and winter snow is deep and cold bitter (*TBH* 162-163). Cold weather can come and take

even the Ojibwe by surprise, by appearing suddenly after a sudden visit of summer – one time Nokomis has to carry Omakayas home to save her from frost bite with bear grease and that time even the mighty hunter Old Tallow, who tracks a white doe, a spirit animal, loses her finger to the merciless frost due to her greed (*TGoS* 170-183). Also, the white hunters hunt many animals fur, making it harder for the Ojibwe to find game (*TBH* 167). Deydey's skills as a chess player brings them some help with salt pork, fish oil, some flour and a few dried apples (*TBH* 165), and Nokomis not only dreams names but also locates in her vision One Horn who will offer his buck life for their survival when the winter is at its harshest (*TBH* 181-184).

Michael D. McNally describes in great detail the effects of smallpox and other deadly diseases, or as he calls them, “deadly microbial exchanges,” that revisited the Anishinaabe as 93 major pandemics (*Honoring Elders* 69). He further describes the social chaos caused by smallpox and other diseases that affected especially the elderly and the young, and in this way had an impact on the authority structure of these oral communities. Together with the shrinking land bases, it became increasingly difficult for the Anishinaabe to maintain the seasonal round that provided not just living but defined the idea of a good life, *bimaadiziwin* (*Honoring Elders* 69-71, emphasis original). In *The Birchbark House* series, Omakayas loses many family members to such diseases as smallpox, among them her beloved little brother Neewo.

In addition to happy and serene moments, nature/land could also show great force with its thunder and storms. Such shows of power are interpreted in the Ojibwe way, connecting humans and manitous, such as the thunderbirds. “Far off, she heard one huge footstep. There was a long silence. Then another step fell. The earth shook slightly beneath her, vibrated as though she lay on the head of a vast drum.” (*TBH* 13). Omakayas remembers how Nokomis calls the island the drum of the thunder beings. There are many powerful and sometimes scary things in the woods, such as balls of witch fire, the hooting of Grandfather Owl or pakuks, the skeletons of little children who fly through the woods or windigos, with their icy breaths (*TBH* 13). Omakayas usually loves storms and never fears, when a binesi, or a thunderbird, flashes its eyes or approaches through the darkening skies with its powerful wings (*TGoS* 88-89). Trickster hero and great teacher Nanabozho has blessed the birch tree, so that it will never be struck by lightning and Omakayas sits against the blessed tree with Nokomis (*TGoS* 89). The Ritzenthalers mention that tobacco was offered to the thunderbirds to secure protection during a windstorm but only Native Americans could protect themselves in this way by throwing tobacco into the fire or by leaving it as an offering in the yard (104). The Thunderers or thunderbirds could also scare away the terrifying water monsters, such as panthers or water snakes (Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 128). Additionally, the motifs of the thunderbirds were used decorating bags with sacred objects and the smaller mats that served as wrappers for war bundles (Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 74, 77).

Even if Omakayas loves the storms, the constant summer rain is not one of her favorites: Nokomis's old bones ache (“Damp ground made Nokomis's old bones ache, so she spreads out her brown cattail mat and sits down there to sew the pieces of bark together.” [*TBH* 8-9]), Omakayas's mother coughs, the tender new ground around their summer dwelling becomes mushy, and droplets cause the fire turn into eye aching smoke and it is too wet and cold to

play (*TGoS* 13-14). At times, in the heat of midsummer when the forests are very dry, lightning can strike and cause forest fires that spread far, and the white settlers, would-be farmers, also use fire to clear their pastures or fields. This is risky and causes even losses of life for the whites, too, and Omakayas's family adopts two white children, John and Susan, or Zahn and Zosed, as they call them, who lost their whole family this way (*TPY* 60-79).

In addition to the powerful thunderbirds, the Ojibwe fear and respect owls. Most people avoid going about in the dark, when Grandfather Owl is calling *kokoko, kokoko* (*TBH* 13, 94) and one never knows what can happen but Omakayas is fearless. She does not mind going out at nighttime. Even if grandfather owl and mischievous spirits are there, there are also the comforting and even musical spirits, and at night the food for the dead looks strangely beautiful, when mushrooms and lichens are glowing light. (*TGoS* 145). The Ritzenthalers (34) describe how small Ojibwe children were told the owl would take them if they did not go to sleep at night or if they did not behave themselves. Thus, the children feared owls and owl masks that the so-called frightener wore to make sure children would avoid dangerous places when playing. The great hunter Old Tallow does not fear owls or other spirits and she always makes her deliveries of bear meat or fish at nights (*TBH* 20, 21). Erdrich mentions in *American Indian Magazine*, "The Continuing Saga of Louise Erdrich" by Phoebe Farris, how the character of Old Tallow is based on her research into traders' journals and accounts of women who lived out roles more traditionally male.⁷⁶ Old Tallow's dress is decorated with the teeth of fox and in her hat she wears a little gold-shafted feather (*TBH* 22). She is very fond of Omakayas, smokes her sweet kinnikinnick pipe and lives with her wolf-like dogs (*TBH* 21-22). The Ritzenthalers provide a lengthy description of kinnikinnick and its meaning in Ojibwe and other Native cultures. Kinnikinnick, meaning "what is mixed" in the Algonkian languages, refers to different plants, such as willows and dogwoods that Native Americans mixed with tobacco for smoking. There were several reasons for using kinnikinnick, some claim it was to create a less strong smoke and some say additional herb ingredients were needed if there was a shortage of tobacco (68). In addition, as earlier mentioned, Omakayas's family smokes kinnikinnick to help with hunger pains that caused at times much suffering (*TPY* 112-113).

Throughout *The Birchbark House* series, the passing of things and the course of life and death is beyond human control, which can be a challenging realization. Omakayas too understands she cannot control anything, neither the events she and her family are forced to face, nor her visions (*TGoS* 224). She cannot control who she is, nor who Andeg is. As a wild bird, Omakayas's pet crow Andeg comes and goes freely throughout *The Birchbark House* stories, and Omakayas must accept that. At times Omakayas hears the voices of the plants, sometimes becomes dizzy, and talks with bears (*TBH* 218-220). Omakayas's mother also tells Omakayas how she and Quill, or Pinch, would have to give up their pet porcupine who one day would not come back. "[...] that made Omakayas feel sad about the passing of things" (*TPY* 92). Omakayas has to learn to give up things, her dog included, and not to turn around or look back. "As they got into the canoe, she heard Makataywazi bark, but she did not

⁷⁶ Farris, Phoebe. "The Continuing Saga of Louise Erdrich." *American Indian Magazine* 17:4 (Winter 2016). (www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/continuing-saga-louise-erdrich).

turn around. She could not turn around. She tried to remember what the waves told her. What her dream showed. She tried to remember how all things change and to go with gratitude.” (*TGoS* 245).

In *The Birchbark House* series, Erdrich also shows the negative effects of the increased contact with whites. In addition to relocation issues, alcohol problems, poverty and hunger touch the everyday life of the Ojibwe families. Since Omakayas’s family is dependent on growing their own food and using natural medicine, one of the worst losses is when all Nokomis’s garden seeds and medicines are stolen by the drunken uncle LaPautre and other thieves. Omakayas has never seen her grandmother weep before but, bravely, Nokomis takes Omakayas to the swamp, “a great medicine bundle,” (*TPY* 103), where they can find many healing herbs and medicines, such as baakwaanatig or the staghorn sumac for stopping bleeding, bagizowim or mugwort for the heart, wiishkobi-mashkosi or sweetgrass and wiikenh or sweet flag for colds, cramps and fevers (*TPY* 104). Due to LaPautre, Deydey also loses many precious things, such as his medicine bag, the stone pipe from his father and the four feathers he meant to use in the ceremony to honor his daughter when she became a young woman (*TPY* 107). The Ritzenhalsers (21) describe how especially in August, when the plants were fully developed and easier to identify, medicinal herbs were gathered, tied and dried, with tobacco offerings. The roots were though gathered in spring and fall and bark during summertime. When a Chippewa collected herbs, took flowers or removed the bark, he or she would talk in a low voice, promising that the substance would be used for good purposes and without taking any more than necessary and asking that its use might be successful (Densmore 127).

At times, Omakayas and her nearest face many struggles and challenges during the 100-year saga from the Great Lakes to the Great Plains, yet they adapt and survive and appreciate the more joyous moments they also share. In the following chapter, I analyze how nature/land provides much happiness to Omakayas and her family.

4.3.3 NATURE/LAND AS A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

In addition to hardships, there are also many happy moments that Erdrich describes in her *Birchbark House* novels. There is much everyday happiness in daily activities, such as harvesting wild rice or maple sugar or picking berries and sharing buffalo feasts. When times are good, Omakayas and her family engage in trading or they care for each other by adopting those in need. Nature/land also provides much needed moments of peace and solace as well as healing herbs and fluffy rabbit-skin blankets. For youngsters, nature/land is an endless source of treasures and games and animal and spirit friends. Humor and laughter are the lifeline for the Ojibwe, and at best they make the challenging times more bearable for Omakayas and her family.

Nature/land provides Omakayas’s family with its delicacies – makuks of moose stew, with fresh greens and berries (*TBH* 12), roasted ears of corn, sweet blueberries, Omakayas’s favorite (*M* 106), and onion-flavored small birds and a strong tea of wintergreen (*TBH* 60), or special traveling food,

venison with berries and boiled fat (*TPY* 49). Omakayas's family also harvests wild rice, and from wild rice fields they get reeds for weaving and use maple wood for smoking the rice (*TBH* 97). Simple things, such as maple sugar, "rock-hard and wonderful" (*TBH* 24), are the source of great everyday happiness. "Before she went back on the trail, Omakayas rinsed off the old candy lump in the lake. It came out beautifully, creamy-golden, translucent and grainy-dark. And sweet. She started walking, her treasure now wrapped in a leaf." (*TBH* 24). Or plump red little berries, called odaemin: "Ah! One, two, three. She'd eaten a huge handful. Another. She grinned [...]." (*TBH* 26). And at times, such berries are shared with her bear brothers. In a painting by Ojibwe artist Norval Morisseau, entitled "The Duty of Elders" (1990), Morisseau depicts a grandmother showing a grandchild how to pick blueberries, opposite to a bear and a bear cub who are doing the same. In Morisseau's words: "Our duty is to teach our grandchildren to share the fruits and berries of the land with the birds and the animals." (*Honoring Elders* 87).

Also, when on the Great Plains, the Ojibwe do not take more than they need and all that they receive they use with great care, sharing with each other. They treat the buffalo with great respect – the hunted buffalo will be used from hoof to horn, and before the hunt, prayers are offered on behalf of the generous buffalo and the gentle and giving Gizhe Manidoo (*M* 46-47). Out of respect, the Ojibwe do not hunt the tough old bulls, the pregnant mothers or those nursing calves (*M* 53). When the buffalo hunting is a success, it means there is a feast and food for all, they will have horns for carrying gunpowder and for ceremonial spoon carving, bones for knife handles, sinew for sewing, shoulder blades for hoes and enough meat to prepare pemmican as traveling food (*M* 55), they have hides and even the dung is collected for fuel (*M* 58). The left overs are consumed by vultures and wolves, and by the next year, the buffalo heads that were placed towards west, will be skulls bleaching under the hot plains sun (*M* 64). Also, when the Ojibwe need help from the buffalo calf to call his family, they offer him a smoke and decorate his forehead with yellow paint, indicating that the calf is sacred (*M* 101).

As mentioned earlier, sharing is one of the key values for the Ojibwe, and part of a good life, *bimaadiziwin*. Thus, when there is food, it is shared with family and neighbors. When Old Tallow, who is a very good hunter and very keen on protecting Omakayas, catches two plump beavers, she happily brings the meat on her little sled to Omakayas's family to prepare (*TBH* 114), and when the winter cold afflicts them all, the venison of One Horn hunted by Deydey is fairly distributed amongst all starving Ojibwe family members and their children (*TBH* 183). The spirits and the family members who are not present are also included when food is offered. When Animikiins is long gone hunting moose in a dangerous snowstorm, Omakayas offers both him and the spirits a makak and a bowl of food, when the family is having their meal (*C* 16-17). Also, when the raggedy ones, the suffering relatives, arrive in summer to Omakayas's summer camp, they are cared for like brothers and sisters and food, clothes and blankets are quickly provided for them (*TGoS* 3).

Even babies are cared for in this manner – Omakayas herself was once adopted by loving tribal members, and similarly she gets a new baby brother when one of the exhausted travelers hand an abandoned baby boy, whose parents may have been killed, over to Omakayas's care (*TGoS* 5, 7). He becomes her wildcat boy, lynx boy (*TGoS* 89), with a voice of a cougar that can

scare even the bears (*TPY* 36). At times, adoption is used as a sign of peace and good will, like when Animikiins, Little Thunder, is adopted as a son of the chief who has lost his own son at the hands of the Ojibwe. For one year, Animikiins will stay with Sisseton and Wahpeton so that the clans can become brothers. (*TPY* 82-85). Animals adopt one another at times, too. When Fly, a spotted roan, loses her foal, she happily adopts both a lamb and a buffalo calf (*M* 30, 63). This buffalo calf becomes like a brother to Omakayas's sons, Chickadee and Makoons, and he follows the twins everywhere and even tries to tip-toe to Nokomis's garden for a treat (*M* 89, 98). The Ritzenthalers (46) describe ceremonial adoption as a mechanism for extending kinship. The main idea is that a kinship society is most effective when all positions are filled, so a diseased person's friend could be adopted by the family, with certain kinship rights and obligations. As mentioned above, the loss of family members due to several epidemics was also a reason to maintain the adoption tradition.

Sometimes Omakayas and her family have enough to sell some of their harvest. For example, maple sugar time allows them to sell sugar in town and this helps the family to pay off debts and buy the things that are needed (*TBH* 216-217). Omakayas and Angeline also sell their dried fish to the town trader and can buy tobacco for Deydey, beads for Mama and Nokomis, and black licorice for Pinch (*TGoS* 130). Later, when Omakayas is already grown-up, she sells the winter's furs with her husband, Little Thunder (*C* 100), and her sons trade twenty rabbit furs to give their mother two silver otter pins that she will keep her whole life (*M* 90, 93-94, 96). The Ritzenthalers elaborate in chapter five of *The Woodland Indians of the Western Great Lakes* the material culture of the Woodland Indians, and they describe, for example, female and male clothing, birchbark artefacts, quill- and beadwork as well as weaving, traditional basket making and hide preparation methods. The Ojibwe were especially known for their hide preparation techniques – something that Omakayas did not much appreciate as a girl – as well as woven bags, quill-decorated birchbark boxes and dental pictographs. Densmore describes how different silver ornaments were purchased most liberally in the spring when the Ojibwe brought in their furs. The value of different furs depended on their size and quality – a bear hide, for example, was not worth more than the equivalent of 10 dollars in trade (141).

As well as providing materials for trade, nature/land is also a source of solace and much needed rest and sleep. On summer nights, the natural environment lulls Omakayas and her family to sweet sleep under “fluffy rabbit-skin blankets that still smelled of the cedary smoke of their winter cabin. They were glad to be close to fire, sleeping on soft grassy earth, under leafy sky, and best of all, near water.” (*TBH* 12). They listen to the pacifying sounds of waves, and the fresh lake wind in the pine trees blows away the mosquitoes (*TBH* 12). Even when it is too cool to sleep outside, Deydey spreads the remains of fire under the sand and Omakayas and her family use the soft sand as mattresses and they sleep sweetly, without bothering mosquitos, the beautiful night sky shining over them. “Their minds were at peace. Underneath Omakayas, the sand radiated a soft warmth. She snuggled into it, her head pillowed. Those she loved were arranged around her, quietly talking or already asleep. The world felt whole and quiet, calm and safe. Omakayas drifted into her dreams.” (*TGoS* 72-73). In deep winter, after Deydey has built a small warming hearth with the heaviest lake stones, they can relax in their winter lodge, and gaze at

the patterns of faces and animals on these smooth rocks, the flames throwing shadows across them (*TBH* 105). When the family travels far west, onto the plains, it is a whole new world of waving grass, with vast skies, hot sunshine, clouds of dragonflies and the shadows of eagles, cranes and hawks (*M* 37).

After the storms have passed, their island sparkles again innocently, the air is fresh and smells of new leaves and mushrooms and Omakayas is eager to go to search for treasures that the waves may have washed onto the beach (*TBH* 14, 15). The island provides for Omakayas many dear things, her willow doll, her little rock people, food, special pieces of driftwood and so on (*TBH* 11). Densmore (64-66) describes in detail Chippewa toys and children's playthings. Some examples of common Chippewa playthings included the leaves of the pitcher plant or "frog leggings" that were used for collecting berries, little snowshoes made of the Norway pine, miniature mats and birchbark utensils, clay animals, dolls from bulrush roots, slippery-elm bark and willow and bows and arrows.

In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, the relationship between the Ojibwe and the natural environment is a very intimate and everyday one. Omakayas, Little Frog, is at times like her animal brothers and sisters: "Like a small, striped snake, like a salamander, or a squirrel maybe, or a raccoon, something quick, little, harmless, and desperate, she slid, crept, wiggled underneath the side of the summer house." (*TBH* 15). Or at times, she feels like a natural force herself: "There was Omakayas – laughter from the front and laughter from behind – and suddenly all of last night's thunder in her heart," feeling furious that she had to tan the hide (*TBH* 16). Animals also respect Omakayas. When Fishtail tells to Omakayas how he has heard she is very dear to the bear people and also has a bird called Andeg, "Andeg tucked the hair behind Omakayas's ear just like a grandfather soothing a child to sleep!" (*TBH* 193). "Owah," said Fishtail, in wonder, you *are* much beloved by these creatures." (*TBH* 193 emphasis original). When Omakayas mourns her little brother Neewo, she is consoled both by the song of the white throated sparrow, Neewo's spirit, and her bear brothers (*TBH* 200-201).

Erdrich intimately links in her writings nature/land and the human world. When Omakayas picks medicine mushrooms with Nokomis, the pine needles sigh above her, gossiping softly, and "[a]ll around, the insects trilled their good-byes to the summer sun" (*TGoS* 102). Also, when Nokomis in her very old age finally gets back some of her garden seeds stolen by LaPautre, she is very joyous to meet her "old friends," "the great-great-grandsons and -granddaughters of the seeds of the plants she'd nurtured so long ago in her gardens on Madeline Island" (*M* 21). Nothing is dearer to Nokomis in her old age than her garden – even when on the Great Plains, the buffalo hunt would not make her leave her beloved plants (*M* 47). She guards them with her diamond willow cane and watches how her hills of potatoes, her beans and squash are flourishing. She weeds and sets snares to too hungry rabbits and she protects the garden with nettle ropes (*M* 77). Providing for her family gives Nokomis great happiness (*M* 125).

In *The Birchbark House* series, Omakayas and her family live close to nature throughout their lives, and when it is time to leave this world, to travel over the fourth hill, as described by Michael D. McNally (*Honoring Elders* 59-60), there is no fear but surrender to a benevolent natural world. Erdrich describes death as a natural, rather than a supernatural, passage. One

morning, Nokomis greets the sun, her palms out, smiling and then lies down carefully between the rows of her gentle plants. In that comfortable softness, she feels lightness and she realizes how she looks down on her old body from above. She knows her time has finally come and peacefully, she says good-bye to her family and turns west, walking lightly away, with her old friend Tallow (*M* 125). Omakayas and her family lights the ceremony fire and keeps it burning for four days, offering mourning gifts to the fire. Nokomis has not wanted any stone or grave house so the family buries her amongst the drying growth of her garden (*M* 127). “I do not need a marker of my passage, for my creator knows where I am. I do not want anyone to cry. I lived a good life, my hair turned to snow, I saw my great-grandchildren, I grew my garden. That is all.” (*M* 127). Densmore writes about the Chippewa burial ceremonies. According to Chippewa beliefs, in the “Hereafter,” everything necessary for life and its occupations awaited the soul, so the family and friends made provision only for his or her comfort for the four days’ journey to that distant place (74). Food was placed beside the grave, and for four nights a fire was kept burning to provide warmth and for cooking. Burial was with the feet toward the west, according to the direction of the spirit’s journey, and relatives also kept spirit bundles with the hair of the dead (Densmore 74-75, 77).

Everyday life with household duties is often a source of joy and happiness for Omakayas and her family. Weaving baskets, gathering roots and harvesting wild rice are everyday chores but tasks that both Omakayas and her sister enjoy. “Right now her sister, Angeline, was digging at the ground near spruce trees and cutting lengths of the roots, used to secure the house better and to finish baskets. She was cheerful, humming at her work[...].” (*TBH* 18). When it is time for wild rice harvesting, Ojibwe girls do the dancing the rice, by treading on the rice and crushing the tough hulls (*TBH* 98), and Omakayas spends much time with her sister gathering ferns, snaring rabbits or visiting the grave houses, looking for food or sugar left for the spirits (*TBH* 25). In Chippewa grave houses there was a shelf for holding food, such as maple syrup, wild rice, and fruits, which would be needed for the soul’s four-day journey. Children and people who did not have much to eat were allowed to help themselves to this food (Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 41).

Animals, both wild and more tamed ones, were an essential part of the everyday Ojibwe life. Omakayas’s family has a close relationship with dogs. Old Tallow has her “wolf pack,” and also Omakayas gets her own dog, black Makataywazi, which has a quiet and alert nature like that of a wild animal (*TGoS* 54-55). Also, on the Great Plains, the Ojibwe have camp dogs who help them to hunt the buffalo (*M* 45). The dogs are faithful and loyal companions, even when the children tease them out of ignorance. When Two Strike’s team has declared a war against Old Tallow’s dogs, still Old Tallow “told her dogs, in the warriors’ hearing, that it was their duty to stay devoted even to these cruel children who had betrayed their trust. These words had shamed them all so bitterly that even Two Strike’s fire was put out.” (*TGoS* 153). At times, the Ojibwe also teach the dogs severe lessons. This happens when Omakayas is threatened by Old Tallow’s dog and when Two Strike, now an adult, catches her dogs killing her sheep – without mercy, these dogs are killed by their owners for the sake of teaching them a lesson (*M* 143). Frances Densmore mentions the following about Chippewa and their dogs. In addition to canoes in summer, the Chippewa used dog teams and toboggans or sleds in winter for

transportation (135), dogs were used in Midewiwin ceremonies (90) and at times charms were used to make watchdogs faithful and competent (109-110).

Whereas the white man's burning water is detrimental to Ojibwe survival and happiness, shared laughter and humor can be seen as a source of tribal happiness and tribal survival. Much of the Ojibwe humor has traditionally been related to trickster stories. The Ritzenthalers write:

Woodland humor is perhaps at its acme in the *Wenebojo* stories, and the humorous passages never failed to provoke laughter among the listeners, although they had heard them time and again. There were many relaxed and ribald references to the feces, the buttocks, the anus, and other parts of the body. There can be no doubt, however, that the Indians identified with Wenebojo precisely because he exhibited human characteristics and failings. (127)

In traditional Ojibwe folktales trickster Nanabushu, who can adopt several forms, is thought to be a mixture between a manitou and a human being and "he is credited with providing the gifts of humor and storytelling to the Ojibwe people" (Schultz 86).

Referring to A.I. Hallowell's observations and his citing of Gilfillan, the Episcopalian missionary at White Earth, Michael D. McNally describes Ojibwe humor in the following manner in *Honoring Elders*:

There is continual laughter, and jests flying all around the wigwam from the time they wake in the morning till the last one goes to sleep. As long as they have anything to eat, and if no one is very sick, they are as cheerful and happy as can be [...]. The old woman says something funny; the children take it up, and laugh at it; all the others repeat it, each with some embellishment, or adding some ludicrous feature, and thus there is continual merriment all day and all evening long. (308-309)

In *The Porcupine Year*, there is a similar humorous scene with Nokomis, whose "tentative little snort" makes Fishtail to "honk of amusement" and Mama then joins, "she fell over, laughing too, in great relief" (29). In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* saga, humor serves several purposes. Humor is essential in Ojibwe culture and part of Ojibwe storytelling, and it makes the challenging times more bearable for Omakayas and her family. Also, in terms of Erdrich's audience, humor is needed when writing for younger readers, whether Native or non-Native. However, to fully understand Ojibwe humor, you may need to be an Ojibwe.

The link between animals and humor in *The Birchbark House* series can be demonstrated in two scenes from *The Birchbark House* novel. When Omakayas saves one of the corn-devouring birds and puts it in a carrying sack next to Deydey's makazins, the bird hides inside the makazin, hops and twitches, making the shoe dance so that her family bursts into laughter (*TBH* 70). Later this bird becomes Omakayas's pet crow Andeg and everybody's favorite, and it rides on her shoulder, hops after her and keeps her company when she attends her daily duties of preparing mats or packing fish and protects Neewo against curious raccoon. Even tanning hides feels easier in Andeg's company (*TBH* 73-74). Andeg gets all the blame, when it tries to warn greedy Big Pinch from eating all the chokecherries he is guarding (*TBH* 84).

Another humorous scene is linked with lice. LaPautre, a known “visionary” and “dreamer,” once tells that he has had a vision that he has lice, which is considered hilarious by the other men and causes them to joke with LaPautre and convince him that the deeper meaning of such lice vision is that next time there is a dance gathering, LaPautre will dance so hard that all his lice will be shed (*TBH* 78). Or LaPautre dreams how his big head gets stuck in an even bigger kettle, for the amusement of Omakayas’s family (*TBH* 123).

In *The Birchbark House* series, humor takes on trickster-like features especially in the character of Pinch, and even though he is at times quite a trouble-maker, he is also a source of great fun for Omakayas’s family. He is something of a trickster character who “will virtually do anything for a meal” and who is “the very embodiment of humor,” learning only slowly by his mistakes but eventually also protecting his people (Gill 72). After eating his belly full, Pinch backs too close to the hearth and his pants catch fire and with a small flame shooting from his rear, he quickly sits in the water bucket, making all laugh to the bottoms of their heart after so much sorrow. This makes Pinch, a joker and trick player, happy – he has in his small way “saved” his family as much as One Horn who had offered his body for their food (*TBH* 185).

At times, nature creates different humorous moments that are a source of laughter and relief for Omakayas and her family, like when the cracking ice with its air pressure makes auntie Muskrat and Miskobines fly out of their blankets and backwards into the sand (*TGoS* 207). Or how Quill’s little porcupine, sighing in happiness, drinks from a cup between its paws the sweet rich swamp tea, prepared by Nokomis (*TPY* 91). The way Pinch, or Quill, imitates the chimookomanag as ghosts with Omakayas is also a source of relief and laughter for Omakayas’s family, after they realize the children have not died but are safe (*TPY* 26-30). When on the plains, there are many simple yet humorous scenes, described by Erdrich. One of them is in *Makoons*, when Chickadee and his brother are busily trying to catch the other buffalo hunters on their oxcart:

“Haii!” yelled Chickadee.
“Howaah!” yelled Makoons.
“Here we go!”
But nothing happened. (49)

Humor and laughter have also an educational dimension in Erdrich’s saga. Cooking talents can at times be a source of laughter, especially if a man is a good cook. When Quill, Omakayas’s brother, shows his excellent cooking skills, he is mocked that he would make a good wife but Quill, whose greatest weapon is laughter, does not get upset but thinks this is a good joke (*M* 65-66). Similarly, yet more sarcastically, the good-looking Gichi Noodin is teased that he would make a good wife too – he is known for his vanity and tendency to tend his looks enough for two people (*M* 66). This handsome Ojibwe is a source of many funny scenes, for example when he wants to impress the ladies, especially Zozie, and ends up riding his horse backwards, holding its tail (*M* 76, 82). Also, the family has a good laugh when Chickadee and Makoons try to

avoid their tanning duties and pretend to be warriors and get frightened by the shrilling war hoops from Nokomis and Deydey (*M* 84). Humor and laughter are especially needed in difficult times, and as Erdrich writes, “the soul of the Anishinabeg is made of laughter” (*TBH* 186). These scenes of shared humor lighten the overall story and also follow the traditional Ojibwe storytelling mode. There is much happiness in this simple life where nature/land provides for all.

4.3.4 NATURE/LAND AS THE SOURCE OF ALL

From the perspective of deep ecology and Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, Erdrich represents nature as a source of all survival, providing the Ojibwe with both happiness and at times challenges.

From the viewpoint of survival, nature/land has multiple values for Omakayas and her family, as expressed by David Kronlid in his categorization of values of nature (41). The natural environment gives Omakayas and her family members essential nourishment and food from pemmican to berries and wild rice, raw materials for clothes, shoes, tools and everyday accessories and plants for worship and offerings. In this way, nature/land has intrinsic worth, having a dignity of its own, but it also produces things that have utility value (things that are good because they are useful for some purpose), extrinsic or instrumental value (things that are good because they are means to attain something that is good), inherent value (things that are good because the experience of contemplating them is good or rewarding in itself), intrinsic value (things that are good in themselves or good because of their own intrinsic properties), and contributory value (things that are good because they contribute to the intrinsically good life or are parts of the intrinsically good life) (Kronlid 41). Also many of the most common features of deep ecology as outlined by Barnhill and Gottlieb (6) become visible when nature is studied as a source of survival, challenges and happiness in *The Birchbark House* series. Humans are not separate from nature at any time but rather humbly see themselves as part of the natural world, the emphasis being on interrelationships, all things in nature/land being valued equally.

Similarly, from the point of view of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, everyday life has its happiness, and the natural world provides peace, solace and rest for the Ojibwe. At times, however, life is also a struggle due to natural circumstances, the coming of the white man, and the uncontrollable changes in their lives. Then balance, harmony and sharing as well as compassion and empathy become very important for tribal survival. Caring for others humbly, patiently and respectfully and thanking the great and kind spirit, Gizhe Manidoo, is the only way they may all survive (*TPY* 59). Medicine, visions, forefathers and healing stories are important in everyday life and especially when facing troubles and challenges. Changes are inevitable, such as when family members take the four-day journey westwards, but still, humor and shared laughter are the lifeline for Omakayas and her family and it gives them strength to be thankful for the gifts of the land in all situations of life, while maintaining Seven Grandfather Teachings and Living Well.

4.4 STORIES OF CHANGE AND CHANGING LANDSCAPES

The Birchbark House series is characterized by the notion of change and stories of change and changing landscapes. In this section of the thesis, I take a look at these different changes from interrupted cycles to the influence of white people in Omakayas's life. These changes are manifested as seasonal changes, changes to daily lifestyle, changes of location and changes to traditional cultural and social structures. Omakayas's family keeps moving, seasons change and new landscapes and eventually new homelands are sought. The rhythmical seasonal moving of locations from summer birchbark house to cedary winter lodge is something that Omakayas's family is used to and even greatly enjoys, but times are changing and unexpected outside events force the family to move on. Home is now more than ever detached from its surroundings and is instead found where one's heart and family are. The circles and cycles are changing by external forces, and underneath the waves glimmering in summer sunshine, there is a fear of loss that even the young ones can sense:

That night, for the first time, everybody got their prizes. Nobody lost the game of silence. For that night they knew the threat of a much bigger loss. They would all fear to lose something huge, something so important that they never even knew that they had it in the first place. Who questions the earth, the ground beneath your feet? They had always accepted it – always here, always solid. That something was home. (*TGoS* 19)

There are forces that try to pull the Ojibwe both physically and mentally away from their lands and traditional ways. The influence of white culture with its American and Christian values is becoming stronger. Yet, even if the landscape and location of Omakayas's home change eventually from islands to great, vast plains, the family creates their new seasonal routines of survival and the elders, such as Nokomis, protect the old ways to the best of their ability. Nokomis teaches Omakayas all the things that are needed for her to grow and mature as a healer, an Ojibwe storyteller and a keeper of the old ways. However, it is worth noticing that even though *The Birchbark House* series is considered young adult literature and as such mainly non-political and not focused on social issues, still throughout the novels there are subtle hints and allusions that for an older reader open up another level of Ojibwe reality and Ojibwe history, that of oppression, forced removals from ancestral lands and times of great social and cultural changes, challenges and sufferings.

4.4.1 INTERRUPTED CYCLES

In *The Birchbark House* and *The Game of Silence*, the first two books of *The Birchbark House* series, the chapter cycle still moves from Neebin (Summer) through Dagwaging/Dagwaaging (Fall) and Biboon (Winter) to Zeegwun (Spring), ending finally in a chapter called Full Circle in *The Birchbark House*

and The Return and the Departure in *The Game of Silence* but in the third novel, *The Porcupine Year*, as well as in the following novels, a search for a new home far from the familiar island landscape becomes reality and this new situation breaks the traditional story cycle of the novel – it is still a year but a different kind of year, now spent by the shores of a lake and later on the Great Plains. In the first novel, the story starts and ends with the bird song, and in the second, the novel begins with the arrival of “The Raggedy Ones,” ending with the return of one of their dear family members, Fishtail, who has endured much, looking “gaunt and weary” (*TGoS* 234). This bird song in *The Birchbark House* is a reminder of change and death but also healing.

When the story in *The Birchbark House* starts ominously from Spirit Island, with its rocky shore and cold fires from the village, it is obvious that not everything is what it seems and changes may be on their way. On the island, only one girl, baby Omakayas, survives the rest, who die of smallpox. Erdrich writes: “Birds were singing, dozens of tiny white-throated sparrows. The trilling, rippling sweetness of their songs contrasted strangely with the silent horror below.” (*TBH* 2). The novel ends again with the song of tiny sparrows, talking to Omakayas in the voice of her dead little brother Neewo, healing her broken heart (*TBH* 239). Michael D. McNally describes how in traditional Ojibwe thought it is important to live in proper ethical and ritual relations with all living beings, human and non-human, and a “lifetime” was also “understood by reference to other cycles, dimensions, and practices of time and space” (*Honoring Elders* 54). The life of the individual is a microcosmic representation of the larger circle of *bimaadiziwin* (or the good life) and it is “calibrated to its rhythms of seasonal and diurnal time” (*Honoring Elders* 54). Even if the traditional landscapes keep changing during *The Birchbark House* series, the traditional teachings of right living are still there. There are still the circle of life and the path of life and there are the four hills of life from infancy to youth and to adulthood and to old age (*Honoring Elders* 57). Childhood is “the age of listening,” youth is “the age of doing,” adulthood is “the age of giving it back” and old age is “the age of sacred learning” (*Honoring Elders* 61).

In the first novel of *The Birchbark House* saga, there is a sense that traditional connections with the natural world still exist. In the beginning of the first novel, *The Birchbark House*, there are still familiar, safe seasonal and daily island routines that are a source of great happiness for Omakayas and her family. In chapter 1, called “The Birchbark House,” Omakayas is described as Little Frog, hopping, jumping, springing wide, and landing on the very tip-top of a pointed old stump. And “[the] lagoon water moved in sparkling crescents.” (*TBH* 2). The beauty and happiness of Omakayas’s world and surrounding nature, with the sparrows singing their springtime nesting songs in delicate relays (*TBH* 6), is obvious: “Thick swales of swamp grass rippled. Mud turtles napped in the sun. The world is so calm that Omakayas could hear herself blink. Only the sweet call of a solitary white-throated sparrow pierced the cool of the words beyond.” (*TBH* 6). So far, all is still well and full of joy for a young girl like Omakayas.

In the second novel, *The Game of Silence*, some things seem to continue, but there is change in the air. When summer comes, the raggedy ones, Fishtail’s uncle, a chief, with his family, arrive, starving, naked, bony and hungry (*TGoS* 1), bringing alarming news about the imminent threat for the

Ojibwe lands. By autumn, Omakayas's heart is worried and she "couldn't help but wonder, whether this would be the last time they would move from their summer camp to their winter cabin on her beloved island" (TGoS 97). Would everything change and these familiar tasks be just a memory? Some things still remain even in town – Angeline goes to school, Deydey works and the log walls still shelter them. Omakayas does not want to think further, it is best just to focus on stuffing the cracks in their lodge, make their cherished cabin neat and tidy and secure their food cache for winter (TGoS 98-99). However, the reality can no longer be avoided when Cloud, one of the tribal members, finally returns from their quest to try to find out whether there is a traitor amongst the Ojibwe, causing all these troubles with the white, and his words are: "It's all lies." (TGoS 196). The Ojibwe do not get their promised land payments and are given spoiled food that kills many tribal members (TGoS 197-198).

Michael G. Johnson's *Encyclopedia of Native Tribes of North America* (2014) states how after the War of 1812, the Ojibwe started to lose their lands due to several treaties and they were restricted to living in reservations in the northern parts of the Great Lakes (43). Frances Densmore further mentions how after numerous treaties from Prairie du Chien in 1829 to Fond du Lac in 1847, the Chippewa had to surrender to the Government their possessions in Michigan and Wisconsin (7). Also, *The Birchbark House* novels reflect a time when the Ojibwe experience the loss of tribal lands and try to find a new way of life and connection with the natural environment in new homelands in the latter part of the 19th century.

The first novel *The Birchbark House* takes place in 1847, the date when the second treaty of Fond du Lac was signed. The tension continued throughout the 1840s. Schenck describes how "[t]he proximity of Indian warfare to white settlements throughout the 1840s prompted the citizens of the Minnesota Territory to agitate for removing the Indians far from their newly established towns and farming communities." (82). On 11 October 1849, the Chippewa's rights to hunt, gather, and fish in ceded lands were cancelled and they were to be removed from all lands to which their title had been extinguished. The stated purpose was "to ensure the security and tranquility of the white settlements in an extensive and valuable district of this Territory" (Schenck 82). The reason for such drastic measures was said to be the Indians' welfare. By removing them far from white settlement they would not be corrupted by whiskey traders and "the government would devote its efforts to their moral advancement through missions and schools, and their economic improvement by teaching them to farm" (Schenck 82). The authorities tried to emphasize to the Ojibwe that removal meant it was going to be of a permanent nature but for the Ojibwe, the word "gosiwin" that the interpreters used meant "removal, decampment, moving from one camp to another" and thus the Ojibwe thought it was more of a seasonal encampment and that later, after the government had sustained them, they could return to their spring grounds (Schenck 88).

In connection with the great failures of the removal of 1850, on the last day of the payment at Sandy Lake, the Pillager chief Flat Mouth spoke for all his people and asked that his words be written down and taken to the governor. He describes in his letter their wretched situation, poverty and hunger and how they were forced to even steal from their fellow Chippewas. He also makes clear that the only true father of the Chippewa is the earth and the sky is their Grandfather:

My Friend:

[...] We have been taken from our country at the most valuable season of the year for hunting and fishing, and if we had remained at home we should have been far better off than we are now with our scanty annuity [...]. You are not our Father and I think you call us your children only in mockery. The earth is our Father and I will never call you so. The reason we call the earth our Father is because it resembles us in color; and we call the sky our Grandfather. We did not sell the ground to our Great Father. We gave it to him in order that he might follow our example and be liberal to us. (Schenck 96-97)

Schenck adds, how “[r]epercussions of this failed removal would resound throughout the following years, and the events are still spoken of in Ojibwe communities of Wisconsin and Minnesota” (97). He further describes, how even though the attempted removal of 1850 was a great failure, plans were already made for a new effort to remove the Ojibwe from Wisconsin to Minnesota territory (123).

So there is reason for Omakayas and her family to fear the future, to sense the threat of a great loss and feel storm clouds gathering. The very ground beneath them is threatened, something they thought they could never lose. But for now, everything is still peaceful, and after having lived in a sweet-scented cabin of cedar for the whole winter on the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker, it is time to cut the birchbark, as the earth has become warm. Omakayas lives in tree houses both summer and winter. After a long winter, spring is the time of rejuvenation. “Tiny white flowers poked out of dead leaves. There were still traces of grainy old snowbanks in the shadiest spots, but in places the sun was actually hot.” (*TBH* 8). Grandmother Nokomis, who is close to bears, is swiftly building their summer house. “Now the dappled light of tiny new leaves moved on Grandma’s beautiful softly lined face [...] Nokomis was ready to make an offering to the spirits, or manitous. They loved tobacco.” (*TBH* 7). Also, she “walked up to the tree and put her leathery paw-like hands on the smooth bark, feeling for flaws” (*TBH* 7). Nokomis talks to the manitous and to her birchbark tree: “‘Old Sister,’ she said the birchbark tree, ‘we need your skin for our shelter.’” (*TBH* 7). “*Pow!* As soon as Grandma made the proper cuts, the birchbark, filled with spring water, nearly burst from the tree!” (*TBH* 8).

Even though the fear of having to relocate is lurking in the shadows, there is still time to follow the traditional seasonal decampment that is a source of great joy and happiness for Omakayas’s family. It is time for the springtime activity, namely maple sugar time that means warmer days with sunshine and the sweetness of spring plants (*TBH* 195). The sugaring place with old sugar maples is at the other end of the island, and Omakayas’s family will build a big sugaring house and use the tools stored in a smaller wigwam. The whole family is engaged – they arrange the food they bring with them, take out the cooking pot, haul wood for the fire and chop taps to open the maples (*TBH* 196-197, *TPY* 168). In spring, there is often a healing ceremony with drums to cure the winter’s illnesses and to teach all the ways of Anishinabe around the tribal fire (*TBH* 208-210). After the sugaring, it is always time to hunt furs, gather foods for winter, fish, pick berries, swim and collect medicines (*C* 42).

Autumn, however, brings changes with its cold winds already in the first novel, *The Birchbark House*. The awareness of the whites and fear of the whites grows stronger, and as nature turns darker, so do the thoughts of the Ojibwe. It is time to repair the canoe, and Omakayas's father Deydey who has come home with gifts when it is blueberry picking time, prepares to leave again. The cold rains are coming and then the harsh snow, so before that he needs to gather and sell the furs of other Anishinabeg and go out to his own trapline, bringing home skins (*TBH* 74). The topics men discuss when smoking the sweet kinnikinnick and asema, or tobacco, have however changed, and men are now concerned about the big knives, the white men, chimookoman who are "traveling in larger numbers than ever to Ojibwa land and setting down their cabins, forts, barns, gardens, pastures, fences, fur-trading posts, churches, and mission schools" (*TBH* 76-77). For Omakayas, these chimookomanag are "the source of some nice things like kettles and warm blankets and ribbons, and the source of terrible things, too," bringing sickness that their own medicine could not heal (*TGoS* 44-45). Later, when Omakayas has a family of her own, the men talk about how the treaty with the Sioux – the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota people – has kept the peace and how their enemies are now bad people, independent of their background, as well as those who are after the land, the white people. Due to starving, there have been incidents between the Dakota and the settlers and the U.S. Army, causing cruel chaos and havoc. The Dakota are forced to leave their homelands and have very little to live for. The future looks grim for them with exile, hunger and home sickness (*M* 87). Even if the situation is not yet this bad for the Ojibwe, they know that it would only be a matter of time that this land will also be taken. And to make things worse, the trader's "milk," or alcohol, causes many problems (*M* 88).

Despite the fear of changes, autumn is the harvesting season for wild rice, the manomin. This also means decampment for Omakayas's family – wild rice grows "across from the island in the great sloughs of Kakagon, where Mama's brother and one of her sisters lived" (*TBH* 91). Even when their minds are worried, still the traditional yearly cycle of activities needs to be taken care of and the harvesting season is always a happy time for the family. There are family games, feasts, long talks and enjoyable visits. Grandma has water-proofed the canoe and before the journey starts, she offers her tobacco to the water for their safe travels (*TBH* 92-93). At times, when the season is almost over and the storm hits suddenly, the family has to break up their wild rice camp in haste and pile everything quickly into their canoes (*TGoS* 83). At one such occasion, Pinch is missing while the storm becomes worse and worse and only tough Old Tallow is strong enough to paddle with her jeemaanan to look for him. Omakayas offers tobacco and prays to the binesiwag, the thunderbirds of storm, to have pity and not strike her or her little brother with their flashy eyes (*TGoS* 87). After the harvest, when it is time to say goodbye to the birchbark house, Nokomis, who is always excited to travel, and the rest of the family gathers all their belongings, kettles, bowls and blankets and heads for their winter cabin (*TBH* 102-103). The first snow covers the landscape, making it a new world that children enjoy with snowballs but the adults wonder, whether Deydey will manage to make the crossing before the freeze-up (*TBH* 107-109).

Despite many moments of shared happiness, during the 100-year saga Omakayas and her family become more and more aware of the changes that will permanently affect their traditional cycles and circles of everyday life.

4.4.2 WINTER WHITE

In addition to the first snow-covered landscape, there are also other “white lands” that need the community’s attention. The nearest town LaPointe is becoming more and more the white man’s territory, a new type of landscape, and men fear the Anishinabeg will eventually be sent to the west, away from their home island (*TBH* 77). In Erdrich’s LaPointe, the presence of the white people is becoming more tangible. The priests have there the Catholic mission school, and Omakayas’s big sister Angeline is eager to join. Fishtail goes to school, too, since he wishes “[t]o learn to read the chikomookoman’s tracks. That way they can’t cheat us with the treaties.” (*TBH* 112). Omakayas, however, feels uncomfortable about the black gown, Father Baraga (*TGoS* 134), who Old Tallow calls “the stealer of souls” (*TGoS* 186), and she is happy that her family keeps their own ways (*TGoS* 135). Father Baraga tells them stories about Europe with kings, queens and wars and where horses carry the ogitchidaag, or male leaders, and where great numbers of people live in cities or gichi-oodenan, close to one another and not moving from place to place (*TGoS* 186-187). By including a character like Father Baraga, Erdrich pays attention to religion and conversion practices that affected the Ojibwe. In *Honoring Elders* (1977), McNally describes how assimilation policies, missionary Christianity and the accompanied social dislocations greatly challenged the structures of Ojibwe cultural and religious influence and served to undermine the traditional cultural authority of elders, causing social chaos with displacements, poverty and diseases. Here again we see the richness of Erdrich’s multi-level storytelling – the stories for young adults include many levels of social and cultural information for multiple audiences.

Autumn then gives way to winter, and the winter turns out to be cold, stagnant, frozen with fear and dominated by whites. As the snow falls deeper, people talk more and more about the territory of the Bwaanug, the Dakota, and the government plans, and more and more serious visitors come to smoke the pipe (*TBH* 123). Since whites live in one place all the time, their garbage piles up. They also easily throw away things (*TGoS* 131). They are not like Omakayas and her family who “moved to maple sugar camp in the spring, then to their birchbark house near their gardens, then to fish camp in early summer, then often out to a berry-picking camp and always to a ricing camp” (*TGoS* 131). Cities like St. Paul smell bad but the Ojibwe move their camps, when they “get too stinky” (*M* 90).

The idea of having to move one day maybe permanently westwards creates many feelings amongst the Ojibwe. For some, the government payments and promised safety are important enough to confront Dakota war parties, harsh winter and hunger. But for others, like Deydey and Fishtail, this feels most disturbing. The whites are chopping their forests down like greedy children and pushing them further and further west, where the spirits of the dead wander (*TBH* 78-79). Fishtail is certain the whites were hungry ghosts before

they came into this world – they want all the Ojibwe lands, all their hunting grounds, all their gardens, even the bones of their loved ones (*TBH* 80), and Deydey, Mikwam, does not trust the “black marks” of the chimookomanag. “The Ojibwe relied on memory. They repeated stories, songs, the words to promises and treaties. Although people scratched elaborate signs on birchbark and rolled them into scrolls, they relied on memory to go with the marks. Memory was Ojibwe writing. Things were not forgotten that way.” (*TGoS* 20). And finally: “Who can take the earth?” (*TGoS* 20). This is a good example of the previously mentioned vernacular and official landscapes (Adamson 90-93). Omakayas and her family face the official landscape with governmental-based language. Such a landscape tries to push away local and individual cultures and rather emphasize the universal. The local living, breathing landscape of the Ojibwe is characterized by local people, like Omakayas and her family, their home and familiar environments with intimate stories, filled with meaning and significance. In this case, the official American landscape may cause the traditional Ojibwe to resist or surrender when trying to save their vernacular landscape.

Eventually the fears of Omakayas and her family turn into reality – the ogimaa or the president of the white people has sent a message to the Ojibwe leaders to leave their homes, since they no longer own the land and places are needed for the white settlers. There is a removal order and land payments will be given out in a new place westwards, where the Bwaanag (the Dakota and Lakota people) used to live, now also being pushed further west, causing severe conflicts between the Bwaanag and the Ojibwe. (*TGoS* 20-21). Deydey laments the situation where the chimookamanag (the white people) push the Ojibwe and the Ojibwe are forced to push the Bwaanag. “We are caught between two packs of wolves.” (*TGoS* 21).

In situations like this, the Ojibwe need the Seven Grandfather Teachings of respect, love, truth/honesty, bravery/courage, wisdom, generosity and humility. In their humility and search for the truth, the Ojibwe think they have somehow broken their promise to be peaceful with the whites, and therefore they must catch the wrongdoers, and a group of Ojibwe men leave their camp to return only when the earth would warm again, not until next year (*TGoS* 25-27). When Omakayas asks about this matter from Nokomis, her grandmother answers that the first chimookomanag are just the first drops of rain and that they can flow the Ojibwe like a river (*TGoS* 29). But going to war is no solution: “We have always found out how to live with them, work with them, trade with them, even to marry them!” (*TGoS* 30). Such words resonate with the wisdom and courage of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. To leave feels, however, too difficult for Omakayas: “If they ever had to leave, Omakayas felt, her heart might fall right out of her body to lie forever on the ground it loved.” (*TGoS* 30).

This is the moment of great struggles for Omakayas and her family. The time has come to move, and after Omakayas and her family left their island, they endured two harsh winters by the great lake, and want now to travel further north, giowedin (*TPY* 42). At their last stop, Sandy Lake, they have heard about the government’s plans for the Ojibwe to create one big place for them all to share “near the land of the Bwaan, where we get the white clay” (*TPY* 45). Omakayas’s family, however, wants to travel even further north to La du Bois, where Omakayas’s cousins are staying (*TPY* 46). The Ojibwe are

between the Bwaan and the whites but the whites represent the primary threat: they “didn’t care whose hunting land they stepped on, Bwaanag or Anishinabeg – they stole it all the same” (TPY 76).

In their effort to try to save their vernacular landscape, Omakayas’s family decides to travel north, even if it means less game. Luckily, the family has enough wild rice to support them and they are well prepared for this long autumn journey (TPY 89-90). However, they go from having all they need to having nothing when robbed by four ragged Anishinabeg, Omakayas’s uncle LaPautre included, and mixed-bloods and one white man (TPY 94-97). In 1866, the Ojibwe of Minnesota are forced to settle on small pieces of land that the older Ojibwe call the ishoniganan or the left overs of their old hunting grounds, though the white settlers call them reservations (M 6). William Warren (506) in his history of the Ojibwe writes that on April 7, 1866 the Bois Forte Ojibways concluded a treaty by which they ceded all their lands around Lake Vermilion.

Omakayas and her family would never forget their home island, the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker, but Omakayas learns to love also this lake with its magical islands, with its mists, rocks and the dark pines, hoping she could live there for a long time (TPY 181). Only change is permanent though, and when Chickadee suddenly gets kidnapped, the family is forced to leave their home for good and move again, now to the never-ending, open plains of Dakota. At that time, the Great Plains are still immense, undivided lands of grass for the indigenous people to wander. When Chickadee for the first time sees the plains, the unknown territory, he asks “Where were the trees? Where were the hills? And again, where were the trees?” (C 54). The plains have no landmarks, just miles and miles of snowy emptiness, the same horizon all around (C 59). When on the plains, the spring blizzard and even early summer snowstorms can be dangerous – there are no hills, no trees to stop the wind (C 63-64). Omakayas’s family is now plains people but “they hadn’t learned yet how to live there” (C 64).

Part of the journey in the vernacular landscape of the Ojibwe traditions is the journey west, to the land of the dead, toward calm and shady places on the earth (White 166). In *The Birchbark House* series, some of the Ojibwe take this journey when the feared guest of smallpox visits young Omakayas and her family in the heart of winter, in the midst of their dance lodge. As described in the chapter called “The Visitor” in *The Birchbark House*, Nokomis and Omakayas do what they can but Neewo and Ten Snow, along with other Ojibwe, pass away, and only the thought that Ten Snow will carry Neewo out of this life to the next gives some solace to Omakayas. In his desperation, Fishtail tries to take his life, so deeply does he mourn for his wife Ten Snow, whose “kind assurance of her nature had reminded her namers of the way the deep snow covers and forgives all it touches when it falls” (TBH 155). Those who travel west are “laid gently into their good mother, Akeeng, the earth,” wrapped in red blankets and birchbark, and grave houses with small windows giving west are built for them. There the Ojibwe bring food and tobacco as offerings for the spirits (TBH 155).

When Old Tallow dies embracing a bear, after a fierce struggle, they bury her high up in a tree, in her sky-grave, on a bed of fir boughs laced together, wrapped in deer skin and with her dogs beside her to accompany her into the next life (TPY 133-134, 136). When it is Omakayas’s turn to stay in her little

woman house (TPY 156-157), Nokomis tells her the story of Old Tallow, who greatly loved Omakayas, and how she became so strong and fierce and how she showed great compassion even to the man who treated her worse than he treated his dogs but how her dogs who loved Old Tallow finally devoured the evil man (TPY 170-178). Old Tallow knew exactly how long to live and how to freely give her life for others when it mattered most (TPY 178-179). Omakayas would bring Old Tallow's spirit bundle to the beautiful tiny island, now Old Tallow's island (TPY 180).

Even if the Ojibwe do not call the dead by name, not to disturb their journey, at times the beloved forefathers and relatives appear during their journeys to save the lives of their children. In *The Birchbark House* series, this happens to Little Thunder, Animikiins, Omakayas's husband, when he is hunting a moose and nearly drowns. Animikiins's dead father appears and Animikiins thinks it is his time to follow the father to the spirit world. But instead the father looks kindly upon his son, showing him by nodding at a branch that helps Animikiins pull himself to the shore and safety (C 7-8, 10-12). When Little Thunder later finds the same moose dead from exhaustion, he smiles, looks into the sky and thanks his father – the family will not starve that winter (C 14).

In Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series, winter white stands for several things: the harshness of the season with less game, hunger and cold and the increasing effect of the white who cut the forests and push the Ojibwe further and further west, to the land of the dead (TBH 78-79). And yet, as the deep snow covers and forgives all it touches when it falls (TBH 155), also the Ojibwe continue to lead the good life, *bimaadiziwin*, and *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well, despite all the challenges.

4.4.3 FAR AWAY

In *Chickadee*, the story continues from 1866. Omakayas now has children of her own, and she lives with her husband Little Thunder, Animikiins, far away from people and the diseases the fur traders brought with them. Their remote land gives them all they need: birchbark for houses, wood for heating, animals and plants for food and fresh lake water for drinking and swimming. However, when one of the twins is stolen, the family's life will change for good, and they will find their new home on the harsh and beautiful plains, with ox carts, horses, buffalos and Metis (C xi), bark huts and skin tents (M 39). Omakayas's family does not give up but decides they will build their cabin and garden if needed (C 108), and they will learn to manage the horses, too (C 110). At times, they still miss the happy days by their own lake with the numberless islands and beautiful beaches with many hidden caves (C 186). Still, Omakayas starts to find a special beauty in her new homelands on the Great Plains, with the vast mystery of ever-changing skies and the beautiful waves of grass (M 107). In the interview "Five Questions for Louise Erdrich," with Martha V. Parravano, Erdrich describes how some of the stories in *Chickadee*, such as the mosquito attack on the ox cart or the infestation of baby snakes where Uncle Quill is sleeping, are entirely based on an actual occurrence. "The

ravenous clouds of mosquitoes are described in many accounts of the Red River Oxcart Trails, and (although I am thankful never to have experienced one) by all reports the attacks were exactly as terrifying as I've written them." Similarly, Erdrich describes the snakes: "As for the snakes, they are a very traditional and chummy creature. They have nests in places where they return every year. I have friends whose house is built on one of these snake nests, and they see snakes every single day."⁷⁷

There are also other semi-autobiographical elements in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series. After Nokomis has moved to the west with light steps, the family travels towards the Turtle Mountains, an area with low hills, surrounded by the plains. They can find there all they need – game, fish, berries, nuts and oak, poplar and birch trees. With the fragrance of leaves and forest earth, this place reminds Omakayas of home (*M* 129-130). And with Omakayas, Louise Erdrich now also reaches her own home, the Turtle Mountains. The past and the present, tobacco offerings included, meet when Erdrich visits her Turtle Mountains. She writes in *Literary Hub* (April 12th, 2017):

When I reached the Turtle Mountains and descended the long curve of hill into the center of town, I decided to continue a mile or so past an all-night gas station that functions as a desperation pharmacy for drug users and a meeting place for many of the reservation insomniacs. I went on because the August dark had fallen at last on the plains, filling the air with a dry softness. There was no cloud in the sky, the moon hadn't risen yet, and just about now the glowing lanterns in the cemetery would be visible. These lights dot the graves old and recent, casting a wobbling greenish radiance. People of the reservation community place the lights, which are solar garden ornaments purchased in the yard sections of large discount stores, there in the ground just over their loved ones.

[...]

By day, our reservation graveyard is a gaudy place with lots of toys left for the deceased, plates of food, cigarettes placed on top of gravestones or sticking in the ground. Cigarettes because it takes a lot of tobacco to walk your road to the other side, where no lung disease is ever going to bother you again.⁷⁸

The old Ojibwe tradition of caring for the dead is still followed – even today tobacco, as well as food, is offered for the four-day journey. In her long poem "Turtle Mountain Reservation," dedicated to her grandfather Pat Gourneau, Erdrich honors the elders that keep the old ways alive and praises the everyday miracles of the Turtle Mountains. In the presence of birth (the heron) and death (the owl), there is a shared miracle called life, a reluctant one and born of clay, where the Catholic and the tricksterish (and humorous) Ojibwe landscape (with nuns instead of traditional Ojibwe sky women) meet, and "the world it becomes:"

⁷⁷ Parravano, Martha V. "Five Questions for Louise Erdrich." The Horn Book Inc. 12.9.2012. (www.hbook.com/?detailStory=five-questions-for-louise-erdrich).

⁷⁸ Erdrich, Louise. "Among the Living and the Dead in the Turtle Mountains. Finding Spirits in the Night and Palimpsests of Probability." *Literary Hub*. (lithub.com/louise-erdrich-among-the-living-and-the-dead-in-the-turtle-mountains/).

The heron makes a cross
flying low over the marsh.
Its heart is an old compass
pointing off in four directions.
It drags the world along,
the world it becomes.

[...]

At dusk the gray owl walks the length of the roof,
sharpening its talons on the shingles.
Grandpa leans back
between spoonfuls of canned soup
and repeats to himself a word
that belongs to a world
no one else can remember.

[...]

Twenty nuns
fall through clouds to park their butts
on the metal hasp. Surely that
would be considered miraculous almost anywhere,

but here in the Turtle Mountains
it is no more than common fact.

[...]

Hands of earth, of this clay
I'm also made from.⁷⁹

The Birchbark House series is characterized by the notion of changing landscapes – throughout these novels, Omakayas and her family travel shorter and longer journeys, smaller and larger circles and cycles, for survival and eventually for new homelands. The Ojibwe lifestyle is about to change drastically, and peaceful life by the lakes is replaced by the winds of the Great Plains. For the Ojibwe, nobody can own the land – it is only borrowed from the future generations. As Fishtail asks: “Who can take the earth?” (*TGoS* 20). Omakayas has to leave her beloved island, but she learns to like other landscapes. Finally, Omakayas and her family reaches the Turtle Mountains, the ancestral home of Louise Erdrich. One circle closes and a new one begins.

⁷⁹ Erdrich, Louise. “Turtle Mountain Reservation.” From *Jacklight* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984). (www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43087/turtle-mountain-reservation).

4.4.4 ALIGNING LANDSCAPES IN NATIVE (OJIBWE) ECOLOGUE

In chapter three, I analyzed the connection of deep ecology with the value of nature, applying the theoretical concepts of Kronlid and Barnhill and Gottlieb. Similar values and connections are visible in *The Birchbark House* series. In Erdrich's novels, even amongst all the changes, nature/land has its intrinsic value in the lives of the Ojibwe, and all things in nature are equally valued, and even small things can have great power. The Ojibwe focus on the whole community rather than just individuals and at no times are humans separate from the natural environment. The Ojibwe see themselves as part of the natural world where interrelationships are emphasized. Omakayas and her family have an intuitive and personal communion with the earth – Erdrich's representation is not sentimental or "new age," it is pragmatic and specific. The earth is seen as sacred and the Ojibwe also feel humility and respect for the earth. There is an awareness of a full dependence on nature/land and its bounty for survival. Thus, most of the aspects of deep ecology are visible in Erdrich's narratives. Jill Doerfler notes how in order to build a strong nation and a strong seventh generation of Anishinaabe, seven teachings are needed, those of courage, humility, truth, respect, wisdom, honesty, and love (*Those Who Belong* 95). These slightly varying teachings that are, also called the Seven Grandfather Teachings as mentioned before, reflect the way in which Omakayas and her family, during their journeys and changing landscapes, treat each other, nature, non-humans, ancestors and all beings in the cycle of life, facing the changes with patience, humility and wisdom.

In *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* (90-93), Joni Adamson explores the concepts of the local landscape and the vernacular and official landscape. As mentioned in chapter three, the official landscape is a governmental- and corporation-based landscape where there is no place for local people, whereas the vernacular landscape is characterized by local people and familiar environments. It is a living, breathing landscape whether urban or rural. Applying these notions to *The Birchbark House* series, one can say that despite the strength of the official landscape of American lawmakers and politicians pushing the Ojibwe further and further west from their traditional tribal lands to new uncharted territories, Omakayas and her family still keep their local tribal culture and remain faithful to their roots and families. They are nourished by their vernacular, living, breathing landscapes characterized by local people, home and familiar yet changing scenes with intimate stories, rhythms and contours, filled with meaning and significance. Omakayas and her family are strongly rooted in the vernacular landscape of lakes and islands and later the plains, so when they are forced to enter the official landscape and face the mainstream culture, they are still able to use, modify and apply these elements for their own survival. The values and traditional wisdom of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue are still present in their everyday lives.

In her stories in *The Birchbark House* series, Erdrich, a skillful regionalist, aligns the two landscapes, earlier mentioned by Sean Teuton (23-24), that of the external landscape with changing regional features and that of the interior landscape of the Ojibwe traditions, creating a harmonious narrative, despite

all the challenges and hardships faced by Omakayas and her family. Even though nature's conditions, natural landscapes and story landscapes constantly change throughout *The Birchbark House* series, Omakayas and her family keep intact the essential elements of Native (Ojibwe) Ecology. Even during difficult times, they show empathy and compassion towards each other, they listen and share, they respect the elders and take shelter of their spirit animals and forefathers, manitous and Gizhe Manidoo, the great and kind spirit. They remain faithful to their medicine and storytelling traditions and humbly ask nature for healing and sustenance when needed. At all times, they try to lead the good life, *bimaadiziwin*, and *Minobimaadizi* or Living Well. They Keep the Land, *Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan*, as described in previous chapters and below in chapter five, by seeing all living entities as part of the precious web of life.

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was to study Native North American literature and especially the literature for young adults in the context of deep ecology and Ojibwe culture by taking a closer look at Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series and nature and nature relationships in her novels *The Birchbark House* (1999), *The Game of Silence* (2005), *The Porcupine Year* (2008), *Chickadee* (2012) and *Makoons* (2016). These novels tell the story of an Ojibwe girl Omakayas and her family traveling from Madeline Island to the Great Plains of Dakota. The period covered is a 100 years of Native American history. These novels have to date received less academic attention, yet they form an important story cycle for Erdrich, for whom these books are "an attempt to retrace my own family history" (*TBH* Thanks and Acknowledgements).

The Birchbark House series is generally considered young adult fiction, but the informative nature of these novels is such that they can be characterized as Native historical prose narratives for all ages, Native and non-Native readers included. For any reader interested in learning more about Ojibwe history, society, spirituality and culture, these novels, even though primarily fictional, provide a good source of cultural information with maps, Ojibwemowin expressions with glossaries, and traditional stories embedded in the texts along with Erdrich's own drawings. These novels do more than just present a one-dimensional portrait that is often seen in frontier literature or popular culture – Erdrich's stories are vivid and varied depictions filled with Ojibwe culture and rich material and emotional life of Omakayas and her family. As Bradford puts it, these stories insert Indigenous historical perspectives and Indigenous formulations of history, myth and truth into accounts of the past (119). And as earlier elaborated, they strongly connect with Erdrich's own family history and her life today.

To study nature/land and nature/land relationships in *The Birchbark House* series, I focused on three main questions or aspects in my thesis by close reading especially from the cultural point of view the above-mentioned novels. These aspects were:

- Stories of Nature as a Teacher and a Source of Healing
- Stories of Nature as a Source of Survival, Challenge and Happiness
- Stories of Change and Changing Landscapes

These questions were analyzed from the point of view of ecocriticism, focusing especially on deep ecology and eco- or land-focused dialogue, called in this context Native Ecologue or more specifically Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, due to the specific nature of the Native Ojibwe worldview present in Erdrich's novels. When analyzing and writing about the above-mentioned points, many themes kept re-emerging in different contexts and instead of writing this thesis in a linear and chronological fashion, the story evolved and developed in circles and cycles, as one would expect when writing about Ojibwe narratives. In this chapter named Discussion, I try to combine and visualize the previously analyzed key aspects.

5.1 THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE SERIES AND NATIVE (OJIBWE) ECOLOGUE: THE CONCLUSION

When analyzing Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series in terms of such concepts, or oppositions, as the official and vernacular landscape, literal and participatory thought, anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism as well as the global and the local, one sees that her writing is situated in the vernacular landscape and is characterized by participatory and nonanthropocentric views. Her writing also reflects both the local and the global, being glocal in nature. This is visualized later in this chapter, in Figure 6.

Joni Adamson's notion of the vernacular landscape is visible in *The Birchbark House* novels by Erdrich's focus on local people, local cultures and local environments. She writes about people's roots, their families and their homelands, in opposition to the official landscape of governments and lawmakers. Her living, breathing landscapes of islands and plains and her intimate life stories with flesh and blood characters and their vivid nature/land relationships are filled with particular meanings and significances and focus on specific personal histories. Her characters are confronted with the official landscape through loss of their lands and through facing mainstream values, policies and the formal system of education. However, Erdrich's characters deal with all this by adhering to the vernacular landscape, adapting, modifying and taking what they need for their tribal survival, still remembering who they are, as Nokomis advises her family in *The Birchbark House* (110).

Erdrich's writing also reflects the notion of participatory thinking, as defined by Bohm. For him, participatory thought refers to tribal cultures with permeable boundaries and objects having an underlying relationship with one another, as with tribes and totem animals, where the tribe and the totem are

one, whereas so called literal thought is by nature scientific, technical and result-oriented (xvi). Throughout her novels, Erdrich emphasizes the close relationship between the Ojibwe and their spirit animals, ancestors and higher beings, such as bears or thunderbirds. Borders are fluid, the past and present mix and beings from different dimensions are present in everyday Ojibwe life, helping and supporting Omakayas and her family members in their time of need. Michael D. McNally also describes how by addressing all beings as possible relatives the Ojibwe were reminded several times a day of the concept of interdependence and of one's place in a web of relations, a web of life (*Honoring Elders* 86-87).

Since *The Birchbark House* series sees all beings as having equal value – with humans being by no means at the center as makers of the universe – Erdrich's novels are also characterized by nonanthropocentric views. When talking about two major environmental ethics categories, Kronlid mentions how anthropocentrism holds that nature does not have intrinsic value or worth as such, whereas all variants of nonanthropocentrism see nature as having intrinsic value or worth (41). In Native writing, such as *The Birchbark House* series, nature/land has inborn and natural value and worth and even the notion of dialogue can further be renamed as Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue, where nature/land, humans and non-humans are equally appreciated as participants in nature/land-based dialogue. In addition, Kronlid sees nature as subject, as informant and as our partner, also consisting of ecological communities. In the Ojibwe world of Erdrich's novels, all beings in nature affect one another as partners, teach each other and inspire each other, thus forming a holistic nature/land-based community of shared wisdom. At best, nature acts like a caressing mother, who consoles her children. "Even the sorrow of leaving the island was soothed a little by the smell of water, the glitter of the waves, the cries of the gulls, the sight of one lone circling eagle who watched over them from above." (*TGoS* 247).

The audience for Erdrich's writing is Native and pan-Indian but also non-Native. Her themes are local, representing Ojibwe worldviews, yet they are also pan-Indian in that they speak to Natives of different backgrounds. Writing in English, her work is both local and global, engaging readers of different ages in different cultures. One might say she gives us the participatory glocal, the middle place where oral tradition and contemporary writing, traditional tribal language and global English meet. Here the writer and the audience, both Native and non-Native, can engage in a constructive dialogue, or Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue. As Bradford states, for Native children, children's literature written by Native writers offer them a chance to experience the narrative in subject position, while non-Native children are given a possibility to appreciate cultural differences and realize how many ideologies that they thought to be natural and universal are actually culturally constructed and not the same for all (12). This is the case with Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series as well.

In addition, *The Birchbark House* series represents what Michelle Stewart has called the Third Generation of children's books – Third Generation is characterized by being simultaneously Native-centered and not Native-centered by being able to go beyond identity issues. As Third Generation books, *The Birchbark House* series is trying to correct possible misunderstandings of the past by undoing misinterpretations, by going

beyond limited views of Native cultures, and by deconstructing essentialist and limited notions of Native American identity, as expressed earlier in Table 1. The overall dimensions and spheres where Erdrich's *Birchbark House* novels operate are visualized below in Figure 6.

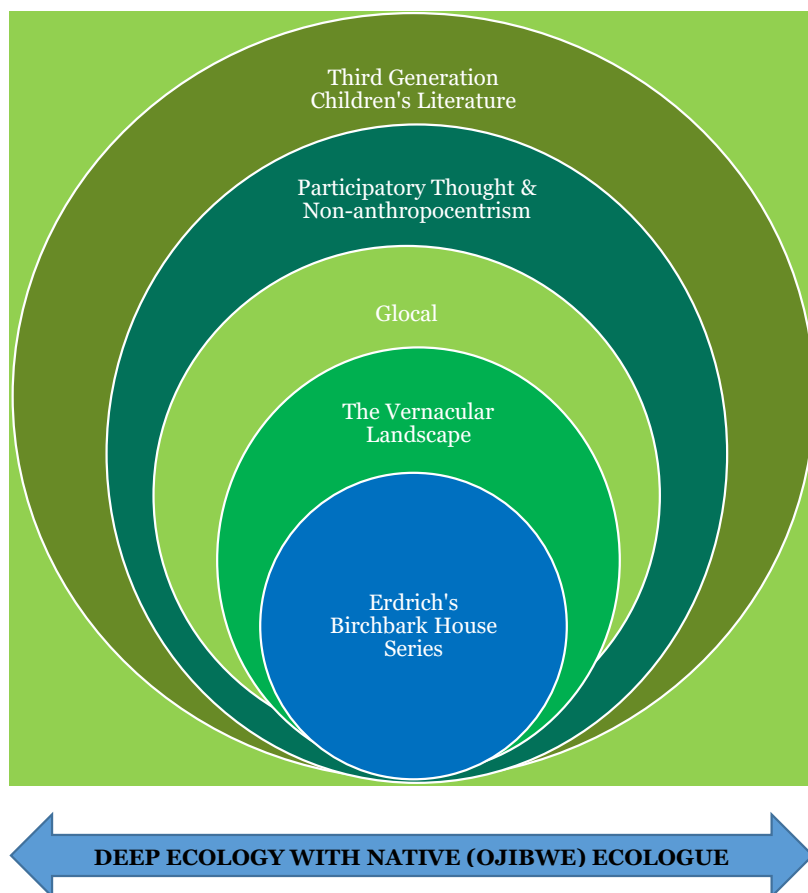


Figure 6. The dimensions and spheres of Erdrich's *Birchbark House* series.

As mentioned in connection with ecocriticism and with Kronlid and Barnhill and Gottlieb in chapter three, Erdrich's writing in her *Birchbark House* series also conveys many of the key features of deep ecology in a Native context and with an Ojibwe emphasis. For Omakayas and her family and for the whole tribe, nature with all its beings has great value. There is no difference between big and small, as Nokomis says: small things have great power. All beings are connected with one another and as part of the natural world. Nature is a sacred yet everyday teacher, and what Nokomis has learned about storytelling or healing, she passes on to the next generations. The traditional Ojibwe treat nature with utmost respect and humbleness. They know how their whole existence is dependent on the bounty kindly provided by nature/land and

higher beings. As explained by Jill Doerfler, their strength as a tribe is dependent on each other and the seven teachings (also called the Seven Grandfather Teachings) (*Those Who Belong* 95).

As pointed out earlier, the inclusive mode of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue is crystallized on the first page of *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, in these words of Nanapush:

Nindinawemaganidok

There are four layers above the earth and four layers below. Sometimes in our dreams and creations we pass through the layers, which are also space and time. In saying the word nindinawemaganidok, or my relatives, we speak of everything that has existed in time, the known and the unknown, the unseen, the obvious, all that lived before or is living now in the worlds above and below.

Nanapush

For the Ojibwe, all beings from all the layers are their relatives, and space and time do not separate them – also the ones who lived before belong to the Ojibwe family, and even the unknown and the unseen are included.

At its best, Ojibwe or any tribal Ecologue may offer for Native literature and story analysis an additional tool for studying the traditional and modern stories within the local tribal cultural context. The overall purpose of Native (Tribal) Ecologue is to promote and make visible the great variety of Native cultures and the multiple elements of their past as well as modern storytelling traditions that the traditional (Western-focused) concept of dialogue may not cover or include. Native (Tribal) Ecologue can also support comparative analysis between different Native and First Nations cultures and literary and oral traditions. As a preliminary model, this concept can and should be further developed to expand tribal/nation-based and tribal/nation-specific dialogue so that it takes into consideration different Native cultures and worldviews, modern writing and different genres included (hence, cross-reading/cross-writing is included in its Mode). Even the fourfold table, as visualized in Figures 4 and 5, with its aspects of Mode, Characteristics, Worldview and Emphasis and Form, is just a starting point and needs to serve the purpose of Native literary and story analysis by being flexible and adjustable.

5.2 THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE SERIES AS OJIBWE STORYTELLING ABOUT NATURE/LAND AND HOPE

What can one then say as a conclusion about nature/land and nature/land relationships in Erdrich *Birchbark House* series? What are the key teachings that can be found in Erdrich's novels and are these novels only for a younger audience? And to what extent does Erdrich rewrite Ojibwe history and what is her message? Like all writers of Native literature, so too the writers of young

adult literature need to challenge and critique many stereotypes and undo many distorted and simplified images and ideas about Native Americans and their histories and identities. We have, for a long time, been bombarded by prejudiced visions, misconceptions and partial stories of Native lives both for adults and youngsters in all sorts of media, from films and photographs to young adult literature.

Native writers like Louise Erdrich give readers a chance to question and reconsider their potentially ethnocentric reading habits, engaging them from their point of view, seeing the other side of the coin and showing the other side of the story – they decolonize by taking back their stories. Histories are now also her stories and Native writers appropriate the english discourse, with a lower case e. Erdrich does this by representing the silenced history of her ancestors and by giving voice to a young Ojibwe female, which is more or less the opposite of traditional history writing, where the story has been dominated by so-called dead white males. For empowering the overall Ojibwe community, life (hi)stories now become also her life stories. Erdrich also represents history from a child's or young person's point of view, including other stories than just Omakayas's, and with these empowering narratives she gives history many new faces. As such, she allots a prominent role in her series to Omakayas's grandmother Nokomis, thus honoring also elders. Even though Erdrich writes fiction, her personal knowledge of Ojibwe history, language and culture is inbuilt in her stories and is thus a reliable source for understanding Ojibwe culture and Ojibwe life. Through her novels, she shows how Native culture survived in the past – despite the displacement to the west as white settlers took over the Ojibwe homelands – and will survive in the future as well, in an ever-changing and evolving process. The act of reclaiming history and cultural voice is one sign of such survival and empowerment – with her stories she changes the “game of silence,” allowing unheard voices to be heard. As Seema Kurup writes in *Understanding Louise Erdrich*:

While so much Native American literature focuses on the victimization of tribes, the prevailing theme in the Birchbark House series is survival and healing. Forgetting is not the way to healing; rather remembering the past, analyzing its effects on the present, learning its lessons, and avoiding historical traps and pitfalls allow future generations to move on successfully. (72)

The voice of children and young people, as well as the wisdom of the elders, are of equal importance and their stories need to be heard, as is a tradition with the Ojibwe. Without these voices, the story cycle or circle is not complete. Young people represent the future, and as Erdrich reminds her readers throughout her *Birchbark House* series, small things have great power. As Nokomis keeps reminding Omakayas, when telling her about the great deeds by small animals, such as Muskrat, “[i]f such a small animal could do so much [...], your efforts are important too.” (*TBH* 175).

Erdrich shows with her writing how things will always change but survival and survivance are still possible even though one cannot control the flow of life. Even if homes and safe surroundings must be abandoned, there will be other places to call home, almost as beloved as one's original landscape. For Omakayas, this means that she learns to love the Great Plains, too. To quote

Li-ping Chang, “[a]s Erdrich’s work so poignantly illustrates, for Native American people, home is nowhere and anywhere” (“(Re)location of Home in Louise Erdrich’s *The Game of Silence*” 132).

Erdrich mentions in *The New York Times* (6.5.2016), how it is the nature of Native people to travel, and they are still on the road.

“Native people have lived here for generations, which is why I feel so at home,” she said. But they’re always in motion: “They’re always going back and forth from the city to their reservation — that’s how they keep their families together,” Ms. Erdrich said. “They put hundreds of thousands of miles on their cars.”⁸⁰

As far as the Ojibwe relationship with the land goes, the Ojibwe made use of nature, had an effect on their surroundings and also left traces of their existence in the landscape but, as described by Erdrich, they did things respectfully, without waste and without intentional harm. That was the way of the Ojibwe in the past, and in this way Erdrich’s literature is also environmental literature, showing how the Ojibwe live(d) as part of land and nature. The teachings provided by Erdrich in *The Birchbark House* series are, however, not just related to the past – they resonate with the need of today and tomorrow concerning sustainable development and living in peace and harmony with the natural environment and all its beings.

In *Routledge Handbook of Landscape Character Assessment, Current Approaches to Characterisation and Assessment* (edited by Graham Fairclough et al.) reference is made to the UNESCO World Heritage Site 2018 Pimachiowin Aki in Canada and the cultural Anishinaabeg tradition of *Jiganawendamang Gidakiiminaan* (Keeping the Land). This tradition is expressed through three practices: *akiing ondaaji'idizowin* (land-based livelihood practices), *akiiwi-gikendamowining* (land-based knowledge) and *aadizokewin* (telling of legends and teachings). With these practices, the Anishinaabeg of today honor the Creator’s gifts through the appropriate usage of the land, respecting other living beings through proper harvesting and ceremonies, maintaining respectful relationships with partners and alliances and respecting the elders as bearers of their cultural tradition (Fairclough et al. 243-244).

The Ojibwe relationship with nature and the ideas mentioned above in connection with Keeping the Land are personified in the character of Nokomis – she is an elder, a storyteller, a healer of her family and in close, intimate and respectful contact with nature through her knowledge of natural medicine, vision quests, spirit guardians, garden seeds and healing stories. She is the keeper of the old ways and she patiently teaches Omakayas to become a future healer and storyteller, to carry on the Ojibwe legacy and traditions for tribal survival. In addition to giving voice to Ojibwe youth, Erdrich makes visible the importance of the elders in Ojibwe tradition, such as grandmother Nokomis.

⁸⁰ McGrath Charles. “Louise Erdrich on Her New Novel, ‘LaRose,’ and the Psychic Territory of Native Americans.” 6.5.2016. *The New York Times*. (www.nytimes.com/2016/05/07/books/louise-erdrich-on-her-new-novel-larose-and-the-psychic-territory-of-native-americans.html).

She also shows how survival is possible when young and old work together, side by side. Each member is important for the Ojibwe community and they all share responsibility.

Michael D. McNally states how elders have been seen but not properly heard in the ethnographic record – questions related to eldership and social and religious landscape or matters of authority and social structure are rarely addressed (*Honoring Elders* 11-13). By emphasizing the role of Nokomis in *The Birchbark House* series, Erdrich paints a multicolored and multilayered picture of a strong, kind, respected, wise and humorous Ojibwe elderly, a woman, a healer and a storyteller who allows the audience to gain a glimpse of “the old ways” and she shows how Ojibwe storytelling and healing traditions survive, from one generation to next.

Nature/land has multiple meanings to the Ojibwe. As clearly shown in *The Birchbark House* series, there is no life without nature/land and nature/land will continue to be of great importance to all living beings in the future as well. Human beings are never separate from each other or nature, from this shared earth, and our future as well as Ojibwe survival fully depend on it. In *American Indian Literature*, Joni Adamson refers to the “garden ethic” that suggests there is a need for local solutions for local needs, based on time and place, with local answers to local questions (67). The time to (over)generalize is over – each Native tribe and nation deserves to be heard as individuals, in their own landscape, respecting their own way of life and identity, their language, roots, wisdom and stories. Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue refers to the Ojibwe as owners of their stories, with freedom to develop their own genres and literary theories to meet their artistic and cultural needs. This is more than “writing back” – it involves a new way of writing and looking at the world that is their very own while at the same time operating within the global paradigm of the 21st century. In reinterpreting and rewriting the previous, incomplete and distorted versions of Ojibwe (youth) history, *The Birchbark House* series is part of this process.

What Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue teaches is that in addition to community, the notion of home is essential for all humans. Home is not just related to the homelands – the most important things in the human life, even if one loses the home, are the people we share our lives and our stories with. We are our stories, or to quote Thomas King, they are “all we are” (*The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*, 2; my emphasis). For the Ojibwe, family is more than just the nearest family members. Family covers not only human relatives, past and present, but also non-humans, spirits, higher beings, plants and animals. All such relationships are characterized by kindness, like that of Gizhe Manidoo. Such kindness is beyond any religion. Maybe it could be called “kindfulness,” something that we need to mindfully learn from the past to maintain today and leave as a legacy for tomorrow. This mode characterizes the Ojibwe idea of good living. Old Tallow knew exactly how long to live and how to freely give her life for others when it mattered most. As Dreese states (116): “Caring more for the other does not mean caring for the self less. It means recognizing one’s position within the multitude of life forms in the universe and taking some responsibility for their well-being. If one is not safe, none of us are.”

When Louise Erdrich received the 2014 Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award, she stated:

I am not a peaceful writer. I am a troubled one, longing for peace. But we are all engaged in a war we hardly dare think of from day to day. As W.S. Merwin wrote, “we are melting the very poles of the earth.” By allowing fossil fuel corporations to control earth’s climate and toxify pure water, we are visiting wars of scarcity upon our children, our generations. Indigenous people are in the front lines because our lands are remote, vulnerable, and often energy rich. I am honored to accept this prize so that I can speak to how we can define our possibilities – we can still astonish history. Peace depends on clean water for everyone, rich and poor, clean energy for everyone, rich and poor. Most of all peace depends upon our collective will to resist our own destruction.⁸¹

Erdrich’s literature for young adults creates an awareness of the land and global ecologies and their importance. As shown in her Holbrooke acceptance speech, survival is a shared issue that touches rich and poor alike. In *The Birchbark House*, Nokomis advises taking from white culture what is needed for survival while at the same time maintaining Ojibwe identity.

“Take their ways if you need them,” she said, “but don’t forget your own. You are Anishinabe. Your mother and grandmother are wolf clan people. Don’t forget. Also, you sweat-bath yourself clean every day, even jump in the freezing lake, a thing that the chimookomanug do not do. My girl, don’t become like them.” (*TBH* 110)

Fishtail went to school, too, since he wished “[t]o learn to read the chikomookoman’s tracks. That way they can’t cheat us with the treaties.” (*TBH* 112)

Similarly, newer forms of media developed mainly by Western culture can be adapted (and improved) by Native cultures for their survival and cultural empowerment. As Erdrich writes in *Books and Islands*, the Ojibwe have used the root “mazina,” to create dozens of words that have to do with images, for example, on paper or screen, such as *mazinaatesewigamig* or movie theater or *mazinesijigan* or television set (5). With the same spirit of innovation and mode of adaptation, on their terms, the Ojibwe can use and create new forms of media, genres and literary theories to promote their narratives and their cultural cause.

Erdrich’s *Birchbark House* series is literature for both young and old, for Native (and non-Native) audiences, and as such it deserves to be analyzed as part of Native tradition and Native writing rather than from the point of view of Western (children’s or young adult) literature. Her series reflects Ojibwe worldviews, values, history, society, identity, spirituality, stories and nature relationships, and its discourse can be considered to reflect Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue where nature/land is the basis of all existence. Erdrich’s story line in this series is partly cyclic, yet still accessible to younger readers. Although relatively easy to read, her series has enough complexities and cultural and sociological elements to attract an older readership as well. The things left

⁸¹ Dayton Literary Peace Prize. (daytonliterarypeaceprize.org/2014-holbrooke.htm).

untold or partially told might create further interest in the reader to know more about Ojibwe history, culture, society, stories and lifestyles, even if some cultural notions are only for Native readers. Erdrich shares trickster stories in *The Birchbark House* series, though leaving out Nanabozho's sexually explicit escapades in view of her younger readers. In addition, these novels tell stories about the Ojibwe past often from the point of view of the younger Ojibwe, showing how they experienced great changes to Ojibwe life and yet survived. Having said that, Erdrich's series represents both the young and the old – a cross-section of Ojibwe life in the 19th century and early 20th century, making history personal and tangible by the telling of individual stories.

Erdrich's literature is also a literature of hope. Despite the fact that Native or Ojibwe history has been faced with oppression, depression, repression, dispossession and other difficult and unbearable situations, still there is much to live for. Native cultures are surviving and flourishing and their writers are recreating their history, giving a rightful voice to those who own stories, persons like Omakayas and her family. Peacock and Wisuri (107) write: "Examples of this self-hate are evident in some of our Ojibwe communities today. We are just now emerging from a period when some Ojibwe people were ashamed of their indigenous heritage. Instead of being proud of their heritage, they would say they were Italian or French-Canadian or they would say nothing at all." When young Ojibwe read stories by Louise Erdrich and other Ojibwe writers, they can feel pride in their cultural heritage and freedom from shame. All stories matter, and some more than others.

Erdrich reminds her audience: "Dear reader, when you speak this name out loud you will be honoring the life of an Ojibwe girl who lived long ago." (*TBH* Thanks and Acknowledgements). Writers like Erdrich are like "Sagachiwe, the red and glowing spirit who comes up every day to make sure the world is safe for the sun" (*TGoS* 78) – with their stories these Native writers promote Native traditions, cultural empowerment and hope for the future generations and offer non-Natives a chance to also participate in Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue for a shared understanding. Such writings connect Erdrich to the Ojibwe concept of the seventh fire that is characterized, in addition to the earlier mentioned survival of the humanity and living well, by the possibility of "the healthy pedagogical relationship being restored between grandparents and grandchildren, or between young and their elders as everybody's grandparents" (*Honoring Elders* 158).

In her conclusion in *Those Who Belong* (94), Jill Doerfler states that the central power of Native stories, such as Erdrich's, lies in the possibility of multiple interpretations and the ability of these stories to be flexibly adapted when circumstances and communities change and new situations emerge. Stories can and will transform and adapt, and one story can be used for multiple purposes, depending on the intent of the storyteller and the audience. Similarly, in this thesis, many points made in Erdrich's *Birchbark House* novels (and the ones still to come) can be used as examples of several different topics and aspects of Ojibwe worldview(s), and naturally, many aspects and topics remain also unaddressed in this piece of research and can be a source for further analysis. Hence, the concept of Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue can and should be flexibly and ethically transformed, adapted and applied for multiple purposes when possible new needs emerge.

6. CONCLUSION: ON THE FUTURE OF NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE AND LITERARY STUDIES

When considering the future of Native American literature and literary studies, one may refer to Jill Doerfler who writes in *Those who Belong*:

The *indian* is stuck in the 1800s. He (yes, not she) wears a Plains-style headdress, has long black hair in two braids, copper-colored skin, and always has a stern and stoic pose. The *indian* has a static identity that holds tight to the past, prohibiting change and adaptation. He is the pure and authentic “full-blood,” simultaneously romantic and tragic. He is posed in museums and photographs but never gets to speak. The *indian* has no tribal affiliation. (xxiv)

In *The Birchbark House* series Erdrich’s replaces such fictive, stern *indian* with younger and older female Ojibwe. These voices from history destabilize previous ethnic and gender stereotyping, without forgetting the many faces of Ojibwe male. She makes the generic “indian” stories personal, real, tangible, concrete and realistic. She gives names and faces to Ojibwe history, and in this way she ends the game of silence.

However, no single work can accomplish everything, and this thesis is merely a starting point for further studies and research within Native American literature and literary studies and especially Native children’s and young adult literature. In the future, one can expect increased variety in terms of Native writing, cross-genres with different art forms, new topics and forms of writing, such as blogs and vlogs, online databases and other different forms of online and mobile communication that all keep the stories alive and add new elements to the cycles and circles of Native storytelling tradition. Such developments that are already now visible can support the cultural survival (and survivance) of Native tribes and nations and promote the resilience of Native languages. One good example of this is James Vukelich’s “Ojibwe Word of the Day,” an online teaching format using different social media channels, where he teaches weekly both Ojibwe and non-Ojibwe about the cultural and varied meanings of single Ojibwe words and their spiritual and historical wisdom and tradition. Here oral tradition has gone digital.⁸²

With new books and new media, the voices that were previously unheard and ignored for different reasons can be rightfully heard and respected as owners of their story and through social media, Native stories can reach new global audiences, while there is also still need for traditional books. In an interview with *TeachingBooks* Erdrich is guardedly optimistic about print culture in a time when it is increasingly threatened: “I think right now we’re facing a very interesting time and we’re perhaps looking at a time when people are more in love with the screen than with the printed word. I hope people

⁸² Vukelich, James. Online teachings.
(www.youtube.com/channel/UCFk1tCJQEH_BP4Kw6ckr4YQ.)

don't give up on the printed word. I think that books are a wonderful form of technology, and I hope that we can keep reading them in any sort of way.”⁸³

There are also more and more Native academics and Native scholars who can with their own research further develop the theories of Native literature and Native studies, thus rectifying a previously distorted canon and recreating a revised one by challenging the previous narratives. In this way, stories will go on till they heal themselves. Part of such healing happens, when we can accept the words by such Ojibwe scholar like Professor Brendan Fairbank who teaches language immersion at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis and concludes in his interview with Mary Annette Pember (“The Heart of Ojibwe Language”): “The best way to learn Ojibwe is to speak from the heart rather than the brain.”⁸⁴

Due to the world situation, especially during the present corona pandemic, the need to find sustainable solutions for demanding environmental and community related issues is imminent. In the beginning of this thesis, reference was made to the social circular economy and its global importance in today's Anthropocene. This concept, with its circles and cycles, is not far from the traditional tribal wisdom now applied in a new and modern context. Tribal wisdom, as reflected in Native (Ojibwe) Ecologue with the understanding of interconnectedness and compassion, is of great value as part of global dialogue and there is much for us non-Natives to learn as far as nature/land relationships go. John A. Grim states, “What is evident, however, is wherever indigenous peoples have endured, they have maintained a loving experience of place, and an understanding that spiritual forces capable of leading humans into understanding of self and utilitarian need abide in all of these places.” (54).

As Jill Doerfler states about her Anishinaabeg culture, transformation and empowerment play a central role throughout Anishinaabeg traditional stories. Stories, like the earth, are consistently being re-created, “but it always takes more than one try” (*Those Who Belong* 93). Doerfler reminds us of the traditional Ojibwe earthdiver story where a new world is created when the old one is flooded. Instead of being the victims of the flood, Nanaboozhoo and the animals co-operate to create and rebuild a new place for themselves. Doerfler sees that we hold the power for recreation, transformation and co-operation. There is no savior in this story – we do this ourselves, with some help from Nanaboozhoo (*Those Who Belong* 93-94). “Our ancestors were earthdivers. They lived through immense change and yet maintained their identities, families, communities, and nations [...]. Anishinaabeg have adapted while maintaining strong identities. Like our ancestors, we are earthdivers. This is

⁸³ *TeachingBooks*. “In-depth Written Interview with Louise Erdrich.” 23.10.2009. (www.teachingbooks.net/interview.cgi?id=63&a=1).

⁸⁴ Pember, Mary Annette. “The Heart of Ojibwe Language.” An interview with Professor Brendan Fairbanks. *Indian Country Today* (30.8.2017). (newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/the-heart-of-ojibwe-language-SxD-4sP9lUyzUPfrmUHy_g/).

our story, and Nanaboozhoo kept throwing the earth around.” (*Those Who Belong* 96).

One good example of such co-operation for shared survival is the earlier mentioned Pimachiowin Aki, “The Land that Gives Life,” which is one of the world’s few UNESCO World Heritage sites recognized for both its cultural and natural values. Through the earlier mentioned Anishinaabe cultural tradition of Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan (Keeping the Land), Pimachiowin Aki has been cared for over the millennia. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is seen as a gift from the Creator to share with the world. The First Nation and provincial government partners of the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation are committed to protecting the outstanding universal value of the Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Site.⁸⁵ By combining the ancient wisdom and land ethic of the Ojibwe elders and Ojibwe cultural heritage and nature protection with the possibilities provided by modern technology and the global agenda, a significant opportunity is offered to create for future generations something very valuable, something that combines the ancient with such enduring and sustainable solutions that bridge the past with the future.

We cannot go back in time – we cannot h(a)unt the past or let the past h(a)unt us – and we cannot simply “go back to nature,” back to “home,” as it used to be but we can re-story our memories for a better future. Ojibwe wisdom is as current today as it has always been. Peggy McIntosh refers to a 1988 TV interview with Louise Erdrich by Bill Moyers, where Moyers asks how Indian values can survive in this world of individuality, competition and technology. As a response, Erdrich asks Moyers, how the world that has come to the brink of ecological crises without Indian values, can possibly survive without them (163). As traditional Ojibwe teachings show, it is possible to comprehend that even today we do not own anything, whether we are Native or non-Native people. We are just entrusted with the earth and the land for the future generations. If we as humans see the interconnectedness and equal value of all life in all its forms, we can, no matter how small our efforts, become empowered and heal and recreate ourselves in the natural world and through stories. Our choices can act like ripples in the waters of Lake Superior, and we can learn resilience, co-operation, wisdom, empathy and compassion from and for each other, and together we may go forward to a shared and hopefully better place. “We should fix what we break in this world for the ones who come next, our children.” (C 180).

⁸⁵ *Pimachiowin Aki*. World Heritage Site. (pimaki.ca/).

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